



# Libertas

## SCHOOL OF MEMPHIS

### Charter Application

**For use by Achievement School District Charter Schools  
applying to Tennessee Public Charter School Commission**

**Opening in the 2022-23 School Year**



## APPLICATION COMPLETION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

This application is designed for use by charter school operators currently operating within the Achievement School District (ASD) and seeking to apply for authorization by the Tennessee Public Charter School Commission (Charter Commission). A separate application shall be submitted for each charter school.

### Prior to Submission

Before starting a charter school application to the Charter Commission, charter school operators shall:

- Be eligible to apply to the Charter Commission through T.C.A. § 49-1-614(k)(2)(B) or T.C.A. § 49-1-614(k)(4).
- Submit a [letter of intent](#) on or before October 15th to the Charter Commission.
- Review all elements of the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act (Tennessee Code Annotated Title 49, Chapter 13).
- Review the Charter Commission's [performance framework](#), [rules](#), policies, and [procedures](#) on the [Tennessee Public Charter Commission Website](#).
- Review the State Board of Education's [Quality Charter School Authorizing Standards](#) (Policy 6.111)

### Format

- The application, excluding attachments and budget worksheets, may not exceed 250 pages. The inclusion of the original application does not count towards the 250-page limit.
- The application should be submitted to the Charter Commission via email to [CharterSchool.Appeals@tn.gov](mailto:CharterSchool.Appeals@tn.gov). Due to email size limits, the application must be submitted via an online file sharing system (Box.Com, Google Drive, Dropbox, etc).
- Each section and attachments of the application should be clearly labeled, and the application should be submitted as one PDF document including all attachments and the budget.
- All pages in the application (after the table of contents) should be numbered sequentially (e.g., 1 of 178).
- The original, approved charter application must be included as **Attachment Q**.
- In addition, one Excel version of the school budgets should be submitted as **Attachment K**.

### Submission

A completed application must be submitted to the Charter Commission and the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) on or before November 15th by 11:59 p.m. Central Time. Note: When the November 15th deadline falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or State-observed holiday, the application materials are due the next business day.

An application fee of \$2,500 must be submitted by November 15th. Checks or money orders should be made out to the State of Tennessee – Tennessee Public Charter School Commission. Failure to submit the application fee will result in the application not being accepted by the Charter Commission.



## GENERAL INFORMATION

Name of ASD Charter School: Libertas School of Memphis

Sponsor of the School: Libertas School

Name of Primary Contact Person: Bob Nardo, Executive Director

Secondary contact person: Sarah Newstok, Development & Special Projects Coordinator

School Address: 3777 Edenburg Dr., Memphis TN 38127

Primary Contact's Telephone: (901) 654-7788

Primary Contact's E-Mail Address: bob.nardo@libertasmemphis.org

Secondary E-Mail Address: sarah.newstok@libertasmemphis.org

Does this applicant have charter school applications under consideration by any other authorizer(s), including the local board of education? (This is for contextual information only).

No

Indicate Applicant Type:

An ASD-authorized school allowed to apply to the Charter Commission based on the determination of the Commissioner of Education under T.C.A. § 49-1-614(k)(2)(B).

☒ An ASD-authorized school allowed to apply to the Charter Commission by meeting the priority exit criteria set forth in the state's accountability model under T.C.A. § 49-1-614(k)(4).

## ASSURANCES

As the authorized representative of the sponsor, I hereby certify that the information submitted in this application for a charter for Libertas School of Memphis is true to the best of my knowledge and belief, realizing that any misrepresentation could result in disqualification from the application process or revocation after award; and if awarded a charter, the school:

1. Will operate as a public, nonsectarian, non-religious public school, with control of instruction vested in the governing body of the school under the general supervision of the authorizer and in compliance with the charter agreement and the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act;
2. Will follow all federal, state, and local laws and regulations that pertain to the operation of a public school, unless waived according to T.C.A. § 49-13-111(p);
3. Will provide special education services for students as provided in Tennessee Code Annotated Title 49, Chapter 10, Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973;
4. Will adhere to all provisions of federal law relating to students who are limited English proficient, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, that are applicable to it;
5. Will follow all federal and state laws and constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability, race, creed, color, national origin, religion, ancestry, or need for special education services;
6. Will utilize this application as a contract with the authorizer, if no other agreement is signed, pursuant to Tennessee Attorney General Opinion No. 10-45;
7. Will comply with all provisions of the Tennessee Public Charter Schools Act, including, but not limited to:
  - employing individuals to teach who hold a license to teach in a public school in Tennessee;
  - complying with Open Meetings and Open Records laws (T.C.A. §§ 8-44-101 et seq.; 10-7-503, 504) (guidance is available from the Office of Open Records Counsel);
  - not charging tuition;
  - following state financial (budgeting and audit) procedures and reporting requirements according to T.C.A. § 49-13-111, 120, and 127;
  - requiring any member of the governing body, employee, officer, or other authorized person who receives funds, has access to funds, or has authority to make expenditures from funds, to give a surety bond in the form prescribed by T.C.A. § 8-19-101; and
8. Will, at all times, maintain all necessary and appropriate insurance coverage.



Signature

Bob Nardo

Printed Name of Authorized Representative

Executive Director

Title of Authorized Representative



<b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ASSURANCES</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SECTION 1: ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 School Mission and Vision	6
1.2 Enrollment Summary	9
1.3 Academic Focus and Plan	12
1.4 Academic Performance Standards	18
1.5 High School Graduation and Postsecondary Readiness (high schools only) - N/A	28
1.6 Assessments	28
1.7 School Calendar and Schedule	31
1.8 Special Populations	34
1.9 School Culture and Discipline	40
1.10 Recruitment and Enrollment	45
1.11 Parent and Community Engagement and Support	48
<b>SECTION 2: OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY</b>	<b>51</b>
2.1 Governance	51
2.2 Facilities	55
2.3 Personnel/Human Capital	56
2.4 Insurance	61
2.5 Transportation	61
2.6 Food Service	61
2.7 Additional Operations	61
2.8 Charter Management Organization (if applicable) - N/A	63
2.9 Waivers	64
<b>SECTION 3 FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY</b>	<b>66</b>
3.1 Budgeting	66
3.2 Budget Narrative	66
3.3 Network Financial Plan (only applicable if the charter school is a part of a larger network) - N/A	66
<b>SECTION 4: PORTFOLIO REVIEW / PERFORMANCE RECORD</b>	<b>67</b>
4.1 Past Performance	67
<b>ATTACHMENTS</b>	<b>73</b>

## SECTION 1: ACADEMIC PLAN DESIGN AND CAPACITY

### 1.1 School Mission and Vision

The mission of Libertas School is to be a school for human flourishing: cultivating the minds, hands, and hearts of children in Memphis for lives of wonder, work, and love. We envision our role - a private school quality education as a free public school - as contributing to the restoration of historic Frayser as a thriving destination neighborhood for families in Memphis.

Wonder, work, and love in Frayser is more than an inspiring slogan — it is our blueprint:

1. We foster an “attachment village” of love through family and community engagement and serving the whole child—including diverse special education and social emotional needs.
2. We offer a rich, rigorous, and personalized education through the method of Dr. Maria Montessori.
3. We inspire the mind to virtue — a life of excellence — through literary and historic examples from across cultures, especially our community's African American heritage.

And because you can't give what you don't have, we prepare teachers to implement this model with high fidelity through our nationally-accredited, state-licensed, public Montessori training program.

Making our mission a reality also requires operating a sustainable nonprofit corporation with strong governance, effective operations, and sound financial management.

A brief overview of Montessori, a time-tested model for developing human potential: Libertas' Montessori classrooms feature multi-age groups of children from an approximately three-year age span, corresponding to scientifically observable traits shared in that plane of development. Teachers offer each child explicit lessons from a detailed scope and sequence (language, mathematics, sensorial, practical, aesthetic and cultural), and then the child advances at his or her own pace, choosing from a range of hands-on activities that are meticulously designed to make abstract knowledge and skills accessible. In this way, the model seamlessly weaves together freedom and structure.



As detailed below, we are steadily moving toward our mission, as measured by students' academic growth, strong culture among students and families (including high engagement with reduction of absenteeism and exclusionary discipline) and faculty (high satisfaction and retention), and organizational financial health.

### Progress

In 2015 we transformed Brookmeade Elementary school—then the second lowest achieving elementary school in the State—into Libertas, Tennessee's first Montessori charter school, and in the process have redefined what is possible for neighborhood schools. Our classrooms stand out and compare to leading private programs. They have rigorous academics accessed through developmentally appropriate, hands-on materials, as well as poetry, literature, music, botany, and more. We deeply engage families, doubling the enrollment and earning over 95% family involvement and satisfaction annually. Restorative practices have reduced

suspensions by three quarters and eliminated expulsions. As a result, the students in our high-poverty neighborhood have achieved significant academic growth—Level 5 for consecutive years—and are now achieving higher than any other neighborhood school in Frayser, any other charter across Memphis, and above the 25th percentile statewide. Our African American subgroup—the large majority of our school—is achieving in the top half of the state. And our diverse learners, the largest concentration of students with significant special needs in the ASD, are achieving in the top 15% of their peers in Tennessee. In seven years, Libertas has become a national model in educating for “human flourishing.”<sup>1</sup>

Libertas is a neighborhood school, enrolling the majority of its students from Brookmeade and adjacent “priority” school zones in Frayser. Most of the other students at Libertas come from immediately adjacent neighborhoods such as Raleigh and North Memphis. As noted in the latest Tennessee Report Card, 86% of Libertas’ student body identifies as Black/Hispanic/Native American. Last year, 53% of our students were economically disadvantaged and 23% were eligible for special education services.

Our school design is highly responsive to our community. Though few Frayser residents knew Montessori by name, conversations with parents consistently revealed their desire for an individualized education that acknowledges children come to school with a variety of aspirations, talents, and needs. Families wanted a better relationship with the school that overcomes the experience of a generation of disinvestment, high rates of exclusionary discipline and low rates of engagement. Therefore, in building a school based on the philosophy and strategies of Dr. Maria Montessori, Libertas is focused on empowering our community to thrive, rather than promoting a curricular brand. At Libertas, the children are the mission.

And Libertas is more than a school. We are a prominent part of the Frayser neighborhood. We work closely with community partner organizations making Frayser a thriving neighborhood once again—with attractive schools and places to raise children—what Frayser was during the lifetime of the parents and grandparents of many of Libertas’ current students.

Finally, our Arete Memphis Public Montessori Residency is deepening our service to this community while also forging connections between it and the whole state. Our training program is enhancing education and career opportunities in Frayser by launching the careers of teachers who share the backgrounds of the students they serve. At the same time, it is bringing teacher candidates—and resources—from across the grand divisions of Tennessee here to Frayser, where they learn and then return home to disseminate the model.

## **Challenges**

We have faced a number of challenges in pursuit of our mission. Because it started as a school authorized by the Commissioner of Education specifically to serve students attending or zoned to attend low-performing schools, Libertas has learned how to remain true to the teaching and learning methods of Montessori and Core Knowledge while improving performance as measured by State accountability systems.

Our first key challenge was developing a sufficient corps of teachers and assistants to implement our model. To address that challenge, Libertas designed its own Montessori teacher training program in line with the national standards of the Montessori Accreditation Council of Teacher Education (MACTE). After establishing a residential training program for its own teachers that meets those standards, Libertas sought and was awarded recognition by the Tennessee Department of Education as an approved Educator Preparation Provider.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a multimedia introduction to Libertas, view the documentary short film, *A Little Piece of Something*:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=1&v=Lwky8vIDw0c&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=Lwky8vIDw0c&feature=emb_logo)

Teachers that complete this Arete Montessori Teacher Residency now meet Montessori standards and Tennessee teacher certification requirements (a \$15,000 value, and a time-saving, streamlined process to dual certification). Thus, Libertas is strengthening the pipeline of Montessori teachers across the state.

A second challenge—a welcome one—has been meeting the needs of a large group of students with disabilities. As seen in the charts below, in 2019/20 (the last full school year for which comparable data were available), Libertas served both the largest percentage overall of students with disabilities, and the highest concentration of “high need” students (those requiring 20 or more hours of service per week) of any operator in the ASD, and significantly more than the charter sector in Memphis (double the overall rate and literally ten times the severity) and Shelby County Schools (SCS).

Special education population by subgroup			
Subgroup	Total enrolled	% SpEd	% high-need
SCS	106,000	11.5%	
SCS charters	16,000	9%	0.30%
ASD	10,000	13%	5%
Libertas	450	24%	9%

IEPs by zone of residence	
Brookmeade (Libertas)	14
ASD other	25
SCS	61

% Special Ed. served by ASD operators		
TDE Projection for FY20	All IEPs	Tiers 3-5
Achievement Schools	12%	6%
Aspire	12%	5%
Cornerstone	17%	6%
Frayser Comm. Schools	16%	7%
Freedom Prep	9%	3%
Green Dot	13%	3%
KIPP	7%	2%
LEAD	15%	4%
<b>Libertas</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Pathways	8%	1%
Promise	9%	3%
Scholars	12%	6%
<b>District average</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>5%</b>

We have addressed this challenge by extensively focusing on special education needs in our teacher residency program and by extending that training to include the paraprofessional teaching assistants who are critical elements of our special education program. Their influence in the school from year to year has been particularly helpful for meeting the labor intensive needs of students with disabilities. Teaching assistants also enable us to keep the adult:student ratio low to best reach the personalized needs of children.

A third challenge has been ensuring that our rich academic model is aligned to meet all of the state’s standards and assessment requirements. In our first few years, students showed strong growth across subjects, but higher proficiency in ELA than in math. Upon further study, we realized that students attained conceptual understanding and procedural fluency through Montessori but needed more practice with application on the challenging word problems on the TNReady. To strengthen student performance in math, we built a better “roadmap” of how teachers can extend Montessori lessons into a “math seminar” that helped them practice applying their knowledge to how it would be tested on TNReady. More detail is available in the Academic Plan section of the application, however the increased proficiency in our last year of results is validating to our academic alignment roadmap.

We have navigated each of these challenges with collaborative leadership involving our board and administrators, but also those closest to the students — parents and classroom teachers and staff. We will address future challenges through similar collaborative efforts.

## 1.2 Enrollment Summary

While fully aware of the different enrollment rules for ASD schools and other charter authorizers, Libertas is committed to continuing to first serve as a school for the Frayser neighborhood and then welcoming other interested students from adjacent at-risk areas (to the greatest extent allowable and practical) and beyond.

Frayser is a large neighborhood with approximately 43,355 residents. Frayser is a high-poverty area, with 38.3% of people living below the poverty line (though the rate is far higher for children), and 17.9% of whom live on less than half of what's defined as poverty level.<sup>2</sup>

By state standards, Frayser has had a severely struggling public school sector. There are approximately 14 public schools in Frayser; when Libertas opened, 12 out of the 14 were on the state's "priority list" for failing schools (excluding only the "optional," test-based school, and one neighborhood school). Furthermore, [Shelby County School's 2019 Regional Seats Analysis](#) (which combines Frayser and the adjacent area of Raleigh into one region) noted that 40% of elementary grade seats in this region were low-quality; only 12.6% of elementary seats were excellent, with 63.5% rated good and 17.7% needing improvement. It is no surprise that approximately 20% of Frayser's families opted-out of neighborhood schools.

In the past seven years some progress has been made both by ASD schools and Shelby County's i-zone, with a couple of schools moving off the priority list. However, most of those schools offer similar educational models to each other. Furthermore, the pandemic eliminated most of those gains for other schools. In the face of these statistics, Frayser has needed an innovative school model like Libertas.

In its first seven years, Libertas has successfully served our neighborhood zone while also attracting families from across Frayser and beyond. In Libertas' first year, virtually all students came from the Brookmeade zone and immediate neighboring priority zones. As our reputation has grown, two-thirds of our students are from Brookmeade and the rest of Frayser (38127), another 20% come from neighboring priority zones such as those in Raleigh and North Memphis (e.g. 38128, 38108, 38107), and the remaining 13-15% come from other areas across Memphis (e.g. downtown, midtown, etc). Many families at Libertas believe that we have helped to transcend the dichotomy of zoned versus lottery-based schools, restoring Frayser from a place where people opt out back into a destination community.

Because Libertas is already operating as part of the ASD, its authorization by the Commission will not increase the number of seats available in Frayser. However, Libertas' authorization by the Commission will, as demonstrated by recent performance, ensure continued provision of a significant number of high quality seats in the community.

Libertas student body demographics as of the 2020-21 school year:

- 86% Black/Hispanic/Native American,
- 53% economically disadvantaged, and
- 23% students with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.city-data.com/zip/38127.html&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1636653686812000&usg=AOvVaw1jSSDjQXlswQ5anTZspOau](http://www.city-data.com/zip/38127.html&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1636653686812000&usg=AOvVaw1jSSDjQXlswQ5anTZspOau)

<sup>3</sup> The percentage of students with disabilities is slightly lower at the start of the 2021-2022 school year at 17.5%, as some older students with IEPs graduated last year, but we anticipate that number increasing as more students are identified during the semester.



If Libertas is authorized by the Commission, we anticipate continuing to primarily serve Frayser neighborhood students first, while expecting the percentage of students from outside the neighborhood to increase modestly. Note that Frayser's geographic proximity to other low-income areas and priority zones, and distance from middle-income areas with higher performing schools, has a de facto effect on influencing our applicant pool in a fashion consistent with our values. Even though our enrollment preferences would have to change once we transition out of the ASD—no longer would we be able to guarantee enrollment to zoned students or give preference to students in other priority zones—we remain committed to the extent allowable and practicable to serve at-risk students, e.g. from priority zones, those eligible for free/reduced-price lunch, and those with disabilities. We will strategize outreach, and monitor our registration trends in comparison to other schools in our area, with these commitments in mind.

Please see the budget narrative section below for a detailed discussion of our enrollment and budget impact. Libertas is perhaps different from some other ASD schools in that we do not rely on zone assignments to achieve enrollment. We implement a comprehensive, proactive annual enrollment plan—featuring local media marketing and grassroots outreach—to ensure that families in the Brookmeade zone and Frayser more generally know about and want to attend Libertas as a public school of choice. As a result, in recent years we have exceeded enrollment targets (Libertas is about 5% over-enrolled this year) and in fact maintain a significant wait list (the total number of students currently on the waitlist is greater than 25% of total enrollment).

Libertas has a well-established enrollment policy and procedure, which would largely continue with some adjustments. We begin accepting applications early in the calendar year (late January / early February). In accordance with State rules, we have an initial enrollment period during which current families are assured of the opportunity to re-enroll. We work hard to utilize this opportunity to ensure that at-risk families in particular are assured of their spots, and generally have more than 80% of current students re-enroll at that time.

At the end of that period we estimate the number of available seats per grade level, and proceed to admit new students, proceeding sequentially through preference groups as outlined below.

Since Libertas has been operating as an ASD school, Brookmeade zoned students were guaranteed enrollment, both at this point and continuing through the school year. Then, applicants from other priority zones would receive the first seats with a lottery held if more applicants from among this priority group than seats available).<sup>4</sup> Both of these elements would be phased-out upon transition, replaced by our efforts to ensure maximum participation in our applicant pool by families from these backgrounds. Then, in accordance with law, our current and anticipated continued practice is to prioritize siblings of current students, then the children of our faculty, and then proceed to admit any other applicants through a lottery. Lottery results then become a waiting list, to be admitted on a rolling basis as space is available. If there is no waiting list for a grade, then seats are awarded in order of application. Applicants have two weeks to accept offers, after which, if we cannot reach them, they are removed.

---

<sup>4</sup> We are aware of tentative proposed legislation that would permit charter schools to prioritize “at-risk” students. Should this be adopted at some point, we would, in consultation with the Commission, implement it in a fashion similar to what has just been described.

### Number of Students

Grade Level	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 + beyond
PreK=3+4 yrs	100	97	97	100
K	89	98	96	100
1	72	81	88	90
2	67	61	66	75
3	58	57	50	60
4	49	49	47	50
5	50	42	40	50
<b>Total - K-5</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>425</b>
<b>Total - PreK-5</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>525</b>

\* Note: the first three years match the budget and near-term capacity; the out years include a modest growth contingency

Current Demographics	% of Economically Disadvantaged Students	% of Students with Disabilities	% of English Learners
2021-2022	53%	23%	N/A
Anticipated Demographics in Year 1 under Charter Commission	% of Economically Disadvantaged Students	% of Students with Disabilities	% of English Learners
2022-2023	53%	23%	Less than 1%



### 1.3 Academic Focus and Plan

When Libertas began serving Frayser families at the former Brookmeade School, it ranked in the bottom 1% of elementary schools in Tennessee (the second lowest). Today, after two straight cycles of Level 5 growth, Libertas has moved past 300 other schools in statewide rankings, reaching the 25th percentile in “school success rate” / proficiency - a level of performance that is more than double the next highest ASD school, and higher than any elementary charter school in Memphis (and in the top 10% of charters statewide). While Libertas has not yet reached the State’s proficiency goals, these achievements are nevertheless substantial.

#### *Key Academic Plan Features*

Central to our work has been a unique academic model. Allow us to begin by elaborate some of its aspects.

As the first Montessori charter school in the state, we offer a research-based, rigorous, personalized learning model. Working particularly with marginalized student populations, Dr. Montessori developed her approach based on extensive empirical observation, through which she identified “sensitive periods” that characterize the planes of child development, and developed tactile manipulatives or “works” that engage children’s concentration on the work of their development. Montessori noted that young children are capable of intense concentration and repeated practice—what Montessori calls “normalization”—when their work is responsive to their planes of development.<sup>5</sup> Montessori features multi-age, heterogeneous environments characterized by freedom within structure. We present engaging, carefully designed, multi-sensory materials that lead “from the hand to the mind,” which help children to concentrate, master fine and gross motor skills, refine the senses, develop robust oral language skills, strong mathematical concepts, artistic sense, and more.

Montessori teachers meticulously prepare an orderly and engaging environment, where students learn through individualized lessons and focused and repeated practice with concrete materials that are carefully designed to build explicit understandings, thematically integrated, increase in complexity, and scaffold children’s comprehension of abstractions. Teachers observe student work, make needed adjustments for each individual’s plan, but avoid interference in “the moment of self-development”: those times of concentration when children are doing the mental work they must do to learn. It is also why Montessori designed self-correcting materials, which make mistakes self-evident. This allows the student to practice independently and struggle with problems while also getting immediate feedback to prevent habituation of error. Through freedom and structure—and a teacher who can make thoughtful judgments based on observation – Montessori environments increase the efficiency of student learning and cultivate the child’s innate curiosity to master his environment.

#### *Adjustments to Academic Plan Features*

Libertas has implemented its initial charter to drive student growth through the Montessori model. However, Libertas has made three noteworthy changes to its academic plan since its original application. These changes were inspired by what we have learned along the way about complementing individualization with consistent exposure to grade level content and assessment expectations. The changes and the rationale for them are outlined below.

---

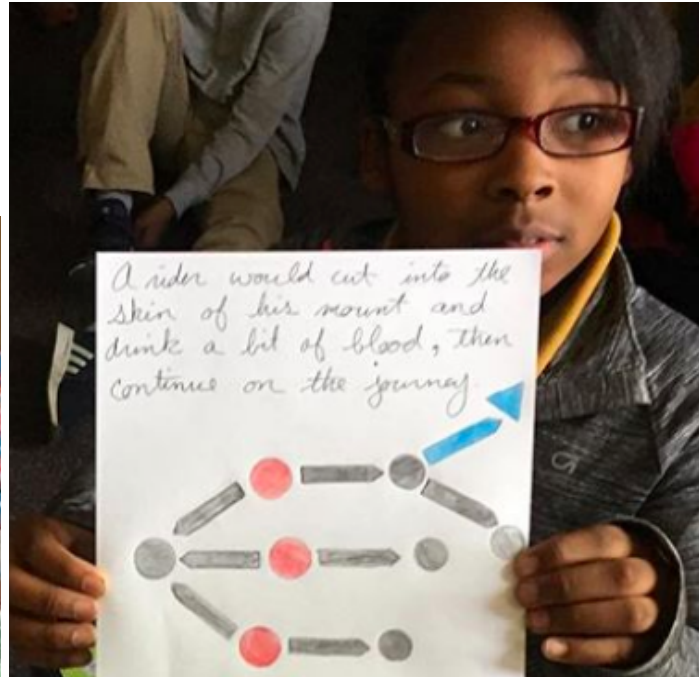
<sup>5</sup> Montessori’s observations of planes of development were contemporary with, or slightly antecedent to, Vygotsky’s work on zones of proximal development. And her analysis of “normalization” prefigured the work of Csikszentmihlyi on ‘flow’ – a state of immersed concentration and focus in which learning is its own reward. Her method is explicitly designed to maximize students’ chances of entering a state of ‘flow.’

Because of Libertas' academic philosophy, every student's Tier I experience is comparable to what in most schools would be characterized as a Tier II intervention under [Tennessee's Response to Instruction and Intervention model](#). Our model works well for individual student growth. Montessori is already quite rigorous. For example, Kindergartners learn place value they would not normally be taught until 1st grade. 3rd graders analyze grammar, morphology and etymology often not encountered until middle school. By itself, however, as an intervention approach, Montessori can be insufficient for students who arrive significantly below grade level proficiency standards to meet their longer-term goals of getting on-track. We need to meet students where they are *and* ensure regular exposure to grade level expectations. While designed with a subset of students in mind, we made some adjustments that are benefitting all Libertas students.



**First, Libertas improved alignment in writing** following the 2017-18 school year. Reading has always been a relative strength, due to a combination of strong phonemic awareness, blending and segmenting, and oral language development through Montessori, complemented with rich background knowledge and vocabulary through daily interactive read alouds with Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) "listening and learning" curriculum (the Tennessee Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission rated CKLA materials "high quality" in 2020<sup>6</sup>), our in-house virtue through literature initiative, and fluency through book clubs. However TNReady expectations for writing are stringent, and our students at that time lacked the stamina or structure to convey their decoding and reading comprehension adequately in writing. Therefore we utilized TN writing rubrics to create more frequent writing instruction and practice opportunities for students (daily writing in response to reading content), embedded within our time for CKLA and seminar (see below); implemented training and ongoing professional development sessions for teachers to analyze student work samples and help think about how to adjust for the following week; and tracked and reported on these data internally through our data dashboard. These adjustments have proven successful, manifested by Libertas students surpassing their individual growth goals in ELA on the NWEA MAP test (with students with disabilities growing even faster than typical peers), and increased on-track and mastery on TNReady.

<sup>6</sup> "Textbook Reviews," Tennessee Textbook and Instructional Materials Quality Commission, available at <https://www.tn.gov/education/textbook-services/textbook-reviews.html> (last viewed Nov. 8, 2021).



(L) A book club with culturally responsive character development literature  
(R) Montessori grammar analysis of social studies content

**Second, Libertas significantly improved alignment in math instruction.**<sup>7</sup> Math at Libertas is primarily taught through individualized Montessori lessons, using carefully designed manipulatives that are helpful in fostering conceptual understanding and procedural fluency. Students showed significant growth on both the nationally-normed NWEA MAP (averaging over 100% of their growth goals) and on TVAAS (Level 5). However, students struggled to translate that into proficient performance on TNReady, manifested in lower scores especially on the “real world application” word problems—a gap we traced to the lack of exposure to grade-level assessment expectations.

Therefore in 2019, Libertas' Academic Alignment Team undertook an intensive process to clarify our academic roadmap in math. The team crosswalked TN Math Standards and Montessori curriculum resources, identified gaps, and created strategies to address them. These included an updated math pacing plan and scope and sequence of lessons aligned to expectations for grades 1-5; Montessori-style work extensions (e.g. “task cards”) to help children practice their skills on more challenging question types; and a series of “snapshots” and quizzes to help teachers monitor student growth not only on individual lesson sequences but also toward grade level standards.

While students continue to receive individualized Montessori math lessons every day, we also made a significant adjustment to delivery methods to ensure access to these grade level experiences. Third grade students in lower elementary classrooms now have “math meetings” several times per week, where teachers walk this subgroup of students through practice problems. We have taken the step even further at the upper elementary level by instituting “**seminar classes**”: fourth and fifth grade students now spend one hour every day in each of a separate grade-level math and ELA class, which ensure coverage of TN standards in these grades, while also preparing students for the format of middle school learning.

<sup>7</sup> The description of math and ELA improvements includes some language directly from our 20/21 TSIP.

Our team also developed a training plan with frequent (two to three times per month) professional development sessions focused on math for teaching teams to collaboratively review conceptual understandings and issues, review student work samples, analyze quiz results, and plan adjustments.

Finally, as a data-driven school, we inspect what we expect. Lesson plans (previously due on Mondays for the current week) are now due for the following week on Thursdays, leaving time for coaches to review and give feedback on Fridays. Teachers are observed at least every other week, followed by feedback / debrief sessions. Data about each part of the process—lesson plans, observations, student work progress, and quiz data—are monitored on Libertas' dashboard to ensure fidelity of implementation.

This comprehensive approach is ensuring high quality math instruction that is Montessori-based and standards-aligned—differentiated and individualized for all learner needs—but also evidence-based and rigorous, incorporated into daily instruction.

**Third, we articulated a full continuum of special education service options.** As noted in the “challenges” section above, Libertas attracts a significant number of students with special needs from neighboring zones. Our school’s multi-sensory, individualized model, in heterogeneous multi-age and multi-ability classrooms—as well as our restorative approach to discipline—has proven highly suitable for a number of early childhood disability types. We present engaging, carefully designed, multi-sensory materials that lead “from the hand to the mind,” helping children concentrate, master fine and gross motor skills, refine the senses, develop robust oral language skills, strong mathematical concepts, artistic sense, and more.

Some of our students were referred or placed by their school IEP teams, while many applied through our enrollment lottery. Some students did so entirely by choice, and others because (according to anecdotal or documented reports) they were “counseled out” by other schools that were not meeting their needs.

*Number of IEPs served by type and placement in 2020:*

IEPs by tier	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Tier 5	Current caseload by primary disability
Diagnosis	Minutes of service per week					
Autism			420	421	1261	24
Developmental Delay			420	421	1261	22
Emotional Disturbance			420	421	1261	2
Functional Delay		All				1
Intellectual Disability			420	421	1261	4
Intellectually Gifted		All				4
Language Impairments	All					9
Multiple Disabilities				1260	1261	1
Orthopedic Impairments		All				1
Other - Health Impairments		1260	1261			8
Specific Learning Disability		1260	1261			16
Speech Impairments	All					14
Total						106

IEPs by service placement	
Self contained	29
Intentionally-designed inclusion	10
Pull-out and push-in	62



Focusing on what was within the school's control, Libertas built a continuum of special education service options.

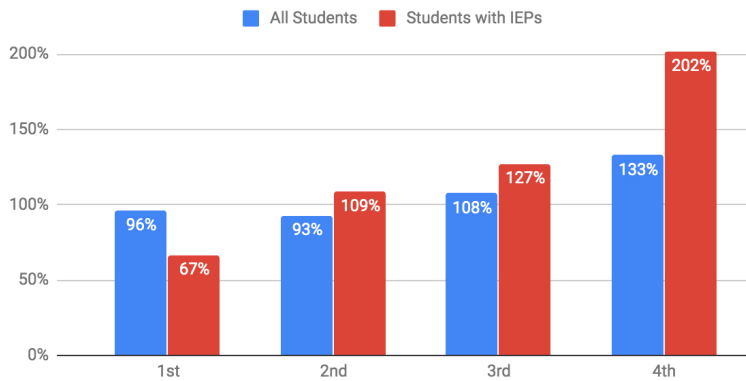
Our instructional team includes seven certified special education teachers (with an average of 10+ years of experience), and five paraprofessionals. Our nurse coordinates an array of health service agency partners, including medical, vision, dental, hearing, and other screenings and interventions (e.g. glasses, immunizations, etc). We have an Applied Behavior Analyst, and a licensed Counselor who facilitates individual and group therapy. We have intensive family engagement with a restorative model. We offer monthly parent educational programs, such as early language development. We also have a team of contracted clinical service providers—a psychologist; two speech language pathologists; part-time occupational and physical therapists—who provide integrated services.

We provide a continuum of settings to meet individual needs and ensure access to the least restrictive environment:

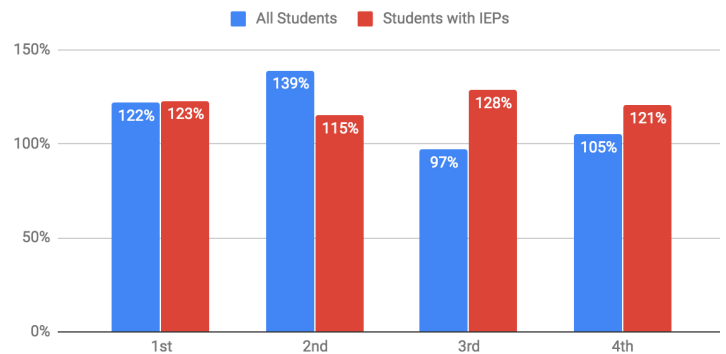
- *Self contained placements* for full-time service of significant needs at three levels: early childhood, lower, and upper elementary. Students in more restrictive settings have significant opportunities with general education peers, and plans outlining the criteria and indications for transition into inclusion.
- *Grouped inclusion* is a general education inclusion classroom that has a significant number of students with disabilities, taught by a dual licensed teacher and supported with an additional special education paraprofessional.
- *Non-grouped inclusion* is also a general education inclusion classroom but with a lower concentration of needs that are met with itinerant support (e.g. push-in teacher, consultative support, paraprofessional, or independent supports like a peer buddy, transition rubric, etc).
- *Resource*: a part-time setting where students with mild to moderate needs can have targeted time and support for IEP goals.
- *Recovery room*: staffed with a social-emotional support expert, this supports any student who needs a place to recover, re-engage, and restore. We see past behavioral symptoms and work on the attachments and developmental skills really needed.

We are proud that through these investments we have had a significant impact, with our students with disabilities growing equal to or faster than their typical peers every single year. The charts below show highlights from the last year of full, comparable data:

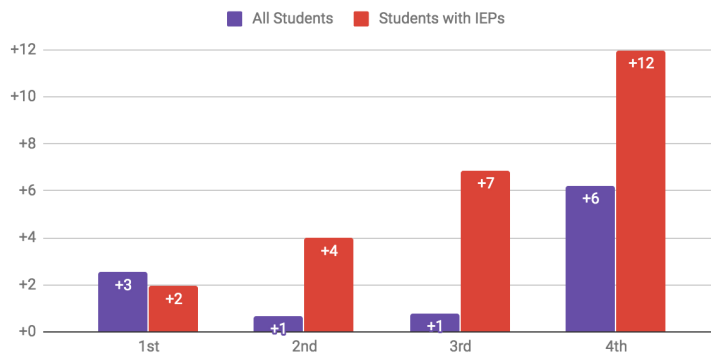
Reading: % of Growth Goal Met (Spring 2019)



Math: % of Growth Goal Met (Spring 2019)



Reading: Avg Nat'l Percentile Growth (Fall 2018 to Spring 2019)



Unfortunately Tennessee's school funding model makes it challenging to sustain such excellent programming. While we receive about \$9,400 per pupil in BEP, Tennessee's school funding model, we spend an average of \$11,000 per pupil overall, with \$9,500 per general education student plus over \$7,000 additional per student for special education, for a total of \$16,500 per special education student. Our special education program costs over \$750,000 per year, of which we receive only about half through BEP and federal IDEA funds. (Tennessee schools are funded at a per pupil average—the same for a typical child as for one with cerebral palsy—and the amount for special education is lower than even other southern states.) The remainder was funded for several years by a district-level weighted funding formula and by a State "Priority School Grant." With that having expired, the difference is currently funded by a variety of annual service fees and public and private grants. While Libertas has and will continue to secure the funding necessary to meet all students' needs, the school looks forward to continuing to work with the Commission on how to meet this shared collective responsibility, while the State works toward a student-based funding formula.

The school's basic model—Montessori and Core Knowledge academics, with an "attachment"-based approach to family engagement, discipline, and culture—has overall been validated as successful and will continue. The adjustments made—extensions and formative assessment in writing and math; greater articulation of special education continuum—are consistent with the core philosophy and are functioning coherently. The school will continue to deliver the core educational program, improved with the efforts described above. The program allows for enabling each student to excel, can and has been adapted based on continuous improvement efforts, and allows teachers and staff to thrive.

#### 1.4 Academic Performance Standards

Libertas is eligible to apply for this charter because we achieved “priority exit status” as defined by Tennessee’s school accountability framework: both by achieving Level 5 TVAAS growth for two consecutive years, and by increasing our school success rate to the 25th percentile (well above the 15th percentile threshold).

Libertas has grown and achieved at a very high level in relation to comparable schools.

- Libertas has taken Brookmeade Elementary from the bottom 1% in 2015 now up to the 25th percentile—passing over 325 schools in State rankings
- Libertas’ “success rate” of proficiency is *more than double* the next highest achieving ASD school
- Libertas’ proficiency is
  - the highest of any zoned neighborhood elementary school in Frayser
  - the highest of any elementary charter school in the city of Memphis
  - in the top 10% of charter schools statewide
- Libertas’ Level 5 growth on TVAAS
  - Among one of just three ASD schools
  - Among one of a single digit number of schools in all of Memphis
  - Accomplished for two consecutive years
- Libertas’ vulnerable student subgroups are achieving even better:
  - African American students are in the top half of the state
  - Students with disabilities at in the top 15% of students statewide

Please see the tables below for details of the comparison data mentioned above.

TN Ready spring 2021 comparison data													
% on-track and mastered by subject area and overall school success rate (SSR)													
Subject	Grade	Libertas			ASD			SCS			State		
		2021	2019	Growth	2021	2019	Growth	2021	2019	Growth	2021	2019	Growth
Math	3-5	12.69	8.6	+4.09	4.04	15.1	-11.06	9.78	33.5	-23.72	32.37	45.4	-13.03
ELA	3-5	20.15	18.6	+1.55	6.61	7.8	-1.19	14.73	23.3	-8.57	31.52	35.5	-3.98
SSR	3-5	16.42	13.4	+3.02	5.33	11.4	-6.07	12.25	28.4	-16.15	31.94	40.5	-8.56



Libertas compared to other zoned enrollment elementary schools in Frayser:

SCHOOL NAME	Student Success Rate	ELA	Math	Science
<b>LIBERTAS</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>18.7</b>
Corning	<5	5.4	<5	<5
Frayser	<5	<5	<5	<5
Westside	<5	<5	<5	<5
Lucie E Campbell	8.5	10.2	6.9	15.1
Hawkins Mill	<5	5.6	<5	5.6
Georgian Hills	<5	<5	<5	<5
Whitney	<5	5.6	<5	7.1
Denver	7.3	9.2	5.4	13.2

Libertas school success rate (metric), state percentile, and TVAAS compared to other ASD schools:

school_name	po ol	participati on_rate	metric	rank	percentile	metric _prior	rank_ prior	percentil e_prior	literacy	numera cy	literacy _prior	numera cy_prior	priority _exit
Libertas School	K8	97.3	16.3	338	25.9	13.4	95	7.2	4	5	4	5	1
Corning Achievement Elementary	K8	97.7	4.6	72	5.5	11.5	68	5.1	3	2	2	4	0
Westside Middle School	K8	89.2	4	59	4.5	3.3	1	0.1	1	1	4	3	0
Frayser Achievement Elementary	K8	95.8	3.8	54	4.1	12.2	79	6	2	3	3	3	0
Whitney Achievement Elementary Sch	K8	89.8	2.8	24	1.8	11.2	60	4.5	3	1	4	4	0
Georgian Hills Achievement Elementa	K8	89.8	3.1	30	2.3	16.5	153	11.5	1	3	3	4	0
Brick Church: A LEAD Public School	K8	90	3.5	42	3.2	10.5	53	4	1	1	4	5	0
Cornerstone Prep - Lester Campus	K8	96	4.3	66	5.1	10.7	56	4.2	4	3	3	1	0
Humes Preparatory Academy Middle	K8	87.8	7.7	150	11.5	6	10	0.8	3	1	1	1	0
Journey Hanley Middle School	K8	86.1	2.5	18	1.4	8.4	26	2	1	2	3	5	0
Journey Hanley Elementary	K8	89	4.9	75	5.7	10.7	56	4.2	4	5	3	5	0
KIPP Memphis Academy Elementary	K8	92	3.4	39	3	15	121	9.1			2	2	0
Journey Coleman School	K8	89.7	5.4	86	6.6	8.9	33	2.5	3	1	1	1	0
Promise Academy - Spring Hill	K8	96.2	7.3	137	10.5	10.6	54	4.1	3	1	2	1	0
Lester Prep	K8	93.4	2.8	24	1.8	12.7	85	6.4	3	1	5	4	0
Neely's Bend: A LEAD Public School	K8	91.2	7.2	134	10.3	14.8	115	8.7	4	4	5	3	0
Wooddale Middle School	K8	91.2	3.5	42	3.2	8	23	1.7	1	1	1	1	0
Cornerstone Prep Denver Campus	K8	87.5	7.3	137	10.5	20.2	212	16	5	1	5	4	1
Memphis Scholars Florida Kansas	K8	97.9	1.6	7	0.5	9.1	37	2.8	3	1	3	1	0
Memphis Scholars Caldwell-Guthrie	K8	92.5	0.9	1	0.1	8.9	33	2.5	1	1	3	5	0
Memphis Scholars Raleigh-Egypt	K8	94.8	6	108	8.3	7.4	16	1.2	3	1	3	2	0
Kirby Middle School	K8	96.4	1.6	7	0.5	8.5	27	2	1	1	2	3	0
Pathways in Education - TN	HS	73				4	13	3.9			3	3	0
Pathways in Education - Whitehav	HS	48				2.3	7	2.1			3	1	0
Fairley High School	HS	92.3	1.6	4	1.2	2.5	8	2.4	2	2	1	1	0
Martin Luther King Preparatory Hig	HS	78.9	3.8	25	7.5	2	6	1.8	3	1	2	1	0
Hillcrest High School	HS	88.4	4.3	31	9.3	6.2	21	6.3	3	2	2	3	0

Libertas compared to all other Tennessee elementary charter schools:

SCHOOL NAME	Student Success Rate ELA	Math	Science
<b>LIBERTAS</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>12.7</b>
Arrow Academy of Excellence	6.7	9.5	<5
Aurora Collegiate	7.4	6.5	7.8
Believe Memphis	<5	<5	<5
Chattanooga Charter School of Excellence	6.6	8.7	<5
Circles of Success	<5	<5	<5
Compass Berclair	7.9	8.3	7.4
Compass Binghampton	8.9	12.8	5.3
Compass Frayser	6.5	6.8	7.7
Compass Hickory Hill	9.4	10.3	8.7
Compass Orange Mound	10.5	15.5	5.2
Cornerstone Lester	<5	<5	<5
Cornerstone Denver	7.3	9.2	5.4
East End Prep*	15.9	19	12.5
Emerald Academy*	19.7	19.1	20.4
Explore Community School	11.7	15.9	8.5
Freedom Prep Westwood	<5	<5	<5
Freedom Prep Whitehaven	5.8	9.6	<5
Granville T Woods	5.1	8.6	<5
Journey Coleman	5.4	6.3	<5
Journey East	8.9	11.6	6.1
Journey Hanley	<5	6.4	<5
KIPP Nashville	7.4	12.6	<5
KIPP Memphis Collegiate	<5	<5	<5
KIPP Memphis Academy	<5	5.6	<5
KIPP Nashville College Prep	11	13.6	7.8
Leadership Prep*	6.6	10.1	<5
Memphis Business Academy	8.3	11.7	5.5
Memphis College Prep	<5	5.8	<5
Memphis Delta Prep	<5	<5	<5
Memphis Scholars Caldwell Guthrie	<5	<5	<5
Memphis Scholars Florida Kansas	<5	<5	<5
Memphis School of Excellence Elementary	<5	<5	<5
Memphis School of Excellence Cordova	13.7	18.9	7.5
Memphis STEM Academy	8.6	12.6	<5
Nashville Classical*	27.4	34.4	18.9
Power Center Academy SE	14.1	16.9	11.1
Power Center Academy Elem	<5	7.4	<5
Promise Academy	6.8	6.1	7.4
Promise Academy Spring Hill	7.3	8.4	6.5
Purpose Prep*	17.6	31.9	9.3
Rocketship Nashville NE	6.2	9.8	<5
Rocketship United	14.6	16.7	11.4
Smithson Craighead Academy	17.2	23.5	10.3
Southern Ave Charter School	7.7	10.7	<5
Star Academy	5.9	5.7	<5
Vision Prep	5	7	<5
* = includes grades 6-8			

Libertas percentile rank among TN schools on 2021 TCAP (TN Ready and MSAA) percent on-track and mastered by subgroup (i.e. success rate for absolute achievement/proficiency):

system_name	school	school_name	subgroup	denom	metric	rank	percentile
Achievement							
School	8095	Libertas	Black or African				
District		School	American	640	11.6	336	52.5
Achievement							
School	8095	Libertas	Students with				
District		School	Disabilities	717	20	622	86.8

Based on prior performance and our improvement trajectory we believe that Libertas students can continue to make academic growth at a level that will meet the requirements of Tennessee's school performance framework (including Annual Measurable Objectives for proficiency) and, ultimately, the performance standards in the [Commission's Performance Framework](#).

Trajectory (TNReady and MSAA)

- ELA: 2018: 9.8% | 2019: 18.6% | 2021 (during COVID-19): 20.1%
- Math: 2019: 8.6% | 2021 (during COVID-19): 12.7%

Current performance in relation to current commission performance framework:

Subcategory	2021 Libertas performance	Commission Performance Framework Rating (grades 3-8)
ELA - absolute perf.	20.1%	Does not meet (Meets 30-50%)
Math - absolute perf.	12.7%	Falls far below (Meets 30-50%)
Growth - TVAAS comp.	Level 5	Exceeds (3-4 Meets)
Chronic absenteeism	25.7% <sup>8</sup>	Falls far below (Meets 10-15%)
ELA - School:District comp.	20.1% to 14.8%	Exceeds (Meets w/in 5 points)
Math - School:District comp.	12.7% to 7%	Meets
Science - School:District comp.	18.7% to 15.8%	Meets
Social Studies - School:District comp.	No score for Libertas on report card: 14.2% for SCS	N/A

<sup>8</sup> Note that the resident district's chronic absence rate was 49.3% in 2021. Libertas' rate declined from 26.7% in 2020 to 25% in 2021, during the pandemic. The State rate was 15.5% in 2021, so the State as a whole did not meet the standard.

Academic performance standards is one of many areas in which Libertas has learned through experience and adjusted our strategies and tactics to foster the flourishing of our students. Libertas plans to continue its growth trajectory by adhering to its mission, continually delivering the key elements of its educational program, operating its focused training program for teachers and teacher assistants, and engaging in performance management for continuous improvement.

We hold ourselves accountable to goals that protect our priorities:

- Providing a deep and rich curriculum to foster love of learning,
- Personalize the pace and maximize the engagement in learning of all students, and
- Strive toward a high standard that will ensure access for our students to advanced educational and career options.

For the 2021-22 school year, Libertas has the following academic goals:

- TVAAS (3+)
- TNReady: Annual Measurable Objectives are still pending from the State Board of Education; the last AMO goals we had from TDE (based on 2019 data) were
  - 10.5% in Math and 21.6% in ELA / overall SSR 16% (excluding MSAA) or
  - 14.3% in math and 23.7% in ELA / overall SSR 18.8% (including MSAA)
- NWEA MAP for K-5: Average 100% of Fall-to-Spring goals met
- PreK / K: Portfolio (Level 4 or 5)
- PreK: Brigance: Increase overall average national percentile by 15 or more points
- Teacher TEAM observations: average 3+

To achieve these year-end goals, we drive performance on a week to week basis by monitoring a series of formative, internal, curriculum-based measures. Key internal areas for monitoring include the following topics and assessment tools. Some are external tools and others are internal. Some have specific targets while others are in a re-norming year and are used to monitor direction more generally.

- Letter-sound correspondences, phonemic awareness & decoding → Montessori phonics screener (see below for more info)
  - Last year, PreK finished the year with 50% letter-sound mastery
- Grade-level reading → CKLA readers (TN-approved high quality literacy materials)—goal is for students read within grade band or make 1.5 years growth
  - Last year, overall growth on grade level reading was from 41% in the fall to 74% by end of year; K-3rd students grew an average of 1.3 years
- Writing → monthly samples rated on State rubrics
  - Last year, 3rd - 5th grade grew from an average of 1.9 out of 4 to 2.7 out of 4
- Math snapshots/quizzes → internally developed based on TNReady item bank
- Reading homework: 70%+ daily completion
- Individual student progress through curriculum → Lesson plans: 95% timeliness, quality average 3+ (out of 4) on internal scale
- Behavior → reduce frequency and severity of referrals to in-house social-emotional support team

We use these tools to measure our students' progress. We regularly review the validity of the tools we use; for instance, after NWEA published their TNReady alignment study, we increased the goal from 70% to 80% that students would need to earn on our snapshots/quizzes to be considered "on track." Progress on these

measures helps to align instructional strategies each week, and the training and ongoing professional development that we provide to our staff.

*Setting, monitoring, and revising academic achievement goals*

All academic indicators are planned, monitored and responded to through the analysis and action-planning stages of our data-driven instruction and leadership cycle.

Our school has a comprehensive team (the “Faculty Council”) and structure for ensuring alignment of continuous school improvement efforts across all aspects of our organization:

- Academics / instruction and assessment,
- Culture / attendance, discipline, and family engagement,
- Operations / Finance, and
- Human systems.

Our team is chaired by the Executive Director and consists of key staff. It is the core of our broader School Improvement team, which includes those same people as well as parent/community members. The Executive Director reports upward from this group to our Board of Trustees, which acts as the final oversight for school level efforts. Finally, the team gathers input from, and cascades down to, the various individual support roles and teams within the school (e.g. grade level teams, special ed team, culture / discipline team, office / operations team, etc). Our school improvement team operates through a series of structures to maintain alignment, and a dashboard to monitor fidelity of implementation, illustrated in the table below:

Organizational alignment structures to monitor school goals and implementation <sup>9</sup>			
What	When	Who	Why
School improvement planning	Annual	Turnaround team, other SIP members	Overall goal setting and initiative planning
Reflective step-back	Three times annually	School turnaround team plus other teachers / staff	Discuss what metrics are we hitting or not; big-picture adjustment
Monthly strategy session	Fourth Mon. 2 hours after school	School turnaround team	Monitor dashboard and deep-dive into current issues to solve
Weekly tactical ops meeting	Every Mon. 1 hour at at lunch	Subcommittee of 5 top leaders from team	Week to week tactical adjustments to implementation
Academic committee	Twice monthly (1st & 3rd Mon after school)	Subcommittee of turnaround team academic leaders	Synthesize classroom observations to plan professional develop
Daily huddle	7:30 every day	All staff	Top things we are doing today to get better
Board meetings	Alternating months, (first Mondays at noon)	Board of Trustees and Exec. Dir.	Oversight of operations
Employee performance management	Three times annual cycle (September, January, May)	All employee, managed by top leaders	Ensure everyone has support aligned with school vision and plan
Classroom observation & coaching	30 min. observation and 30+ min. coaching every one to two weeks	Consulting teachers (coaches)	Ensure alignment of daily classroom instruction with academic roadmap
Professional development	2 hours every week, 10+ days throughout year	All teachers/staff, led by turnaround team members	Constant learning of content and pedagogy to meet student needs
Child study	1 hour weekly	Grade teams, led by turnaround team members	Ensure action for individual struggling students
Dashboard	Live update daily	Turnaround team	Monitor leading indicators of progress and flag need for adjustment

These processes interlink to ensure we act on what we learn. For instance, daily huddles reinforce long-term goals by explicitly connecting daily actions with the overarching plan; three-times annual employee performance management cycles draw upon the same dashboard so that individual issues with implementation can be addressed, etc.

Linking these various structures is our robust Data Dashboard. The dashboard helps us monitor and analyze all the data points listed above in order to inform professional development, curriculum development, academic instruction, student and family supports, and other management adjustments. The dashboard itself is built through an interlocking series of data and tracking systems, including Google Docs and Spreadsheets,

<sup>9</sup> Excerpted from our Priority School Turnaround Plan, 2019

PowerSchool, EIS, MAP, classroom observation tools, surveys, behavioral referrals documents, our financial software, Help Desk, and more (and is being migrated to a new data platform built with Ed-Fi protocols by Landing Zone). Each metric has specific goals set by our leadership team in concert with SIP team, Board, and key leaders. Progress is monitored throughout the process outlined above, so that decisions can be made about what adjustments to make.

For purposes of illustration about our approach to performance management and continuous improvement, below are some excerpts from our leadership data dashboard from the end of the 20-21 school year. These are the sources for the internal progress data mentioned in section (b) above.

<b>Goals:</b> PreK 35% by EOY Kinder: 75% by EOY 1st: 85% by EOY 2nd+: 90% by MOY	Letter-Sound Correspondences (% of 41 key letter-sound correspondences)											
				Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
	Primary Averages		PreK	16%	21%	28%		32%	43%	47%	48%	50%
			K/1	30%	43%	50%		60%	65%	70%	76%	78%
	Elementary Averages	1		61%	71%	74%		79%	81%	81%	85%	86%
		2		71%	83%	88%		90%	90%	92%	92%	93%
		3		81%	85%	87%		90%	92%	92%	94%	95%
		4		92%	94%	95%		95%	97%	97%	98%	98%
		5		94%	97%	98%		99%	99%	100%	100%	100%

Average Decoding Growth for Children Behind Grade Level (Years.Months)	
	Current
Primary	0.6
1st Graders	1.1
2nd Graders	1.2
3rd Graders	1.4
4th Graders	0.9
5th Graders	0.8

% Met EOY Decoding Goal (within grade band or 1.5 years growth)	
	Current
Primary	80%
1st Graders	62%
2nd Graders	74%
3rd Graders	76%
4th Graders	95%
5th Graders	83%

Percent of Children Decoding within Grade Band												
				Initial	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
First Graders				18%	29%	35%		46%	53%	62%	62%	64%
Second Graders				30%	35%	44%		40%	46%	57%	58%	66%
Third Graders				53%	61%	65%		64%	65%	67%	73%	67%
Fourth Graders				45%	43%	48%		52%	56%	56%	76%	88%
Fifth Graders				58%	54%	62%		57%	64%	64%	64%	79%

#### Writing Sample Scores - In-Person Learning

				Initial	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
First Graders	(Max 5 pts)			1.9	2.3	2.1		2.7	2.7	2.8	2.6
Second Graders	(Max 5 pts)			1.8	2.1	2.2		2.4	2.8	2.7	2.7
Third Graders	(Max 4 pts)			1.8	1.9	2.1		2.0	2.1	2.2	2.3
Fourth Graders	(Max 4 pts)			1.9	1.9	2.2		2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6
Fifth Graders	(Max 4 pts)			2.1	2.3	2.6		2.5	2.7	2.8	3.0



### Math Snapshots

2nd Grade Snapshot				
Score Range	# Ss	%	#Ss	%
# 75% and above	1	4%	2	6%
# between 50% & 75%	4	15%	8	24%
# between 33% & 50%	7	27%	7	21%
# Below 33%	14	54%	16	48%
Total Tested	26		33	

3rd Grade Snapshot				
Score Range	# Ss	%	#Ss	%
# 75% and above	0	0%	1	4%
# between 50% & 75%	0	0%	7	26%
# between 33% & 50%	6	29%	10	37%
# Below 33%	15	71%	9	33%
Total Tested	21		27	

4th Grade Snapshot				
Score Range	# Ss	%	#Ss	%
# 75% and above	0	0%	2	11%
# between 50% & 75%	2	9%	5	28%
# between 33% & 50%	6	26%	3	17%
# Below 33%	15	65%	8	44%
Total Tested	23		18	

5th Grade Snapshot				
Score Range	# Ss	%	#Ss	%
# 75% and above	0	0%	0	0%
# between 50% & 75%	0	0%	4	40%
# between 33% & 50%	3	60%	1	10%
# Below 33%	2	40%	5	50%
Total Tested	5		10	

### Lesson Planning and Recording: Timeliness and Quality

#### Timeliness Summary

Class	YTD	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
In-Person Average	86%		92%	84%	86%	85%	92%	90%	85%	79%	86%
At-Home Average	87%		83%	78%	93%	85%	93%	93%	100%	94%	82%
Sped/RTI Average	84%		86%	83%	84%	88%	100%	100%	81%	81%	50%
Schoolwide Avg	86%		89%	83%	88%	86%	94%	94%	88%	83%	76%

[Link to Data Source](#)

#### Quality Summary

Class	YTD	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
In-Person Average	2.9		2.9	2.9	2.9	2.8	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.9	3.0
At-Home Average	3.0		2.6	2.9	2.9	3.0	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.1	3.0
Sped/RTI Average	3.6		3.6	3.7	3.5	3.6	3.9	3.9	3.7	3.3	3.3
Schoolwide Avg	3.1		3.0	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.0	3.0

### Corrective action planning

Libertas was designed with continuous improvement in mind. Above, we described the goals, measures, and alignment systems we have in place to monitor progress and make adjustments. These structures continue to enable us to provide the right support and interventions for teachers and students to achieve our mission. For instance, if in our weekly leadership meeting we identify a certain indicator off track for a given class or grade level, we can flag that for a coach to monitor with a teacher during their next scheduled observation and/or address during their coaching session, and then if not addressed it can be escalated to that teacher's next evaluation cycle. Or if a teacher identifies a student struggling based on data trends noted in the dashboard, they can refer that child to Child Study, and the next week it will ensure special education and SEL support staff observe the child in the environment and work with the teacher to identify and try solutions. As described in 1.3(a) Academic Focus and Plan, Libertas has made larger-scale adjustments to its academic program in light of student outcomes and seen significant improvements.

If Libertas falls off its intended pace for student achievement or below the goals established in partnership with the State or district, we follow a process similar to what we did previously for ELA or math. Those improvement efforts were successful because we adhered to the following principles and practices. We would design and implement any necessary corrective action plan accordingly.

1. Ground any efforts in our educational program philosophy.
2. Determine the goals of the corrective action and ensure we have a way to monitor progress.
3. Draw upon the expertise of our teachers, assistant teachers, support staff, Board, and external partners to determine what strategies are needed to reach the goals.
4. Provide training, ongoing professional development, and tracking to ensure fidelity to the corrective actions such as upgraded curriculum, different pedagogy, and/or increased supports for teachers, students, or families.

Any corrective action planning would flow through our turnaround leadership team, which is a role filled by our Faculty Council. This group meets regularly (every two weeks) throughout the year to review and update the school plan. The team is chaired by the Executive Director and consists of key staff.

The Faculty Council is the core of our broader School Improvement team, which includes those same people as well as parent/community members:

- Sarah Newstok, Parent
- Glen Hancox, Grandarent
- Vinessa Brown, parent and Trustee
- Teddy King, parent and Trustee
- Other parents who participated in this year's process include Jacoba Green, J. Reed-Banks, Michelle Jarrett, Patrick Bingham

Finally, the team gathers input from, and cascades down to, the various individual support roles and teams within the school (e.g. grade level teams, special ed team, culture / discipline team, office / operations team, etc). Our school improvement team operates through a series of structures to maintain alignment, and the Data Dashboard is essential for monitoring fidelity of implementation. The school turnaround team also guides the school planning process.

The Executive Director reports upward from this group to our Board of Trustees, which acts as the final oversight for school level efforts.

## **1.5 High School Graduation and Postsecondary Readiness (high schools only) - N/A**

### **1.6 Assessments**

Libertas' Montessori methods and Core Knowledge curriculum are strong in terms of building background knowledge and vocabulary, and providing concrete foundations for both procedural fluency and abstract concepts. As we discussed above in the academic section, we have also intentionally designed curricular extensions and formative assessments to prepare students and monitor progress toward summative State and national assessments.

To ensure students know what they need to know to meet State standards, we have practice tasks that are individual standard-level and problem-level checks for understanding, tied to Montessori work, that teachers can integrate into instruction and student practice on a daily/weekly basis. In addition to the underlying academic skill or knowledge, students also learn to perform on less familiar testing formats: unpack word problems, find multiple pathways to solutions, complete uniformly timed assignments—very different from our individually paced classrooms—and in some cases work on computers.

We also use standardized and internal, formative assessments that monitor our progress toward goals and help students prepare to show what they know. In section 1.4 above, we outlined in some detail our key internal assessments and goals as part of our broader performance management strategy. To briefly recap: in addition to TNReady as our summative State test, we monitor individual and sub-group progress through the following measures.

- NWEA MAP: A nationally-normed assessment that serves as our required “universal screener,” administered three times per year to K-5th grade in both ELA and Math. Helps us to track how well our curriculum is translating into nationally-normed growth, and projected TNReady proficiency (note that students must be at about the 75th national percentile to be proficient on TNReady)
- Aimsweb: A state-required RTI progress monitoring tool; used to inform Child Study and performance management of intervention staff.
- PreK & Kinder Portfolio: A robust assessment based on normed review, using TN Early Learning standards, utilizing student work samples drawn from our curricular sequence; collected at different points throughout the year. Portfolio generates teacher effect size scores that we include for performance management.
- Brigance: A comprehensive developmental assessment administered three times per year to PreK. This is a requirement of our local PreK funding; teachers use it to inform curriculum planning.
- Montessori phonics screener: A curriculum-based tracker for growth in letter-sound correspondences, phonemic awareness & decoding. Teachers use this to make week-to-week adjustment in lesson plans. We believe this correlates with growth on State and national assessments.
- Grade-level reading: A curriculum-based internal measure of decoding, fluency, and comprehension, using CKLA readers, a TN-approved high quality literacy material. We believe this correlates with growth on State and national assessments.
- Grade-level writing: An internal measure of writing within content studies, as measured by State rubrics. We believe this correlates with growth on State and national assessments.
- Math snapshots/quizzes: Internal measure of math proficiency based on questions from TNReady item bank. We believe this correlates with growth on State and national assessments.

Our academic alignment and formative assessment strategy is based on research. In a recent meta-analysis of several education research studies over the past generation of school reform, scholar David Squires concludes, “the research demonstrates that school districts can improve student achievement by ... aligning their written, taught, and tested curriculum.”<sup>10</sup> Specifically, the study suggests aligning the taught curriculum to standards and assessments by featuring “tasks that encompass an objective and how that objective will be demonstrated in instruction.”

The research “promised better student results if instruction aligned practice with test items as well as the concepts the items tested, particularly for low-aptitude students.” And it recommends a “management system” and formative “common assessments... to know that the curriculum has been both taught and assessed while providing grist for data teams to make sense of the results” (Squires, 133-4). Our approach, based roughly on the *Understanding By Design* model, is specifically named as one of a few known design approaches that “actually incorporate[s] alignment into a curriculum design that makes sure that what is tested gets taught” (129). This research meets the ESSA requirement for at least Tier II “evidence of statistical correlation, with controls for selection bias, that an intervention is likely to improve student outcomes.”<sup>11</sup>

The sections above have thoroughly explained our comprehensive approach to assessment and analysis of data to drive instruction and professional development. This section will briefly elaborate on teacher-level data collection, use, and teacher evaluation.

A significant portion of our formative assessment data comes from teacher’s observations and data gathering with students, including administration of the Montessori phonics screener, math quizzes, and grade-level reading and writing work. Teachers are trained during in-service and at key professional development points throughout the year on the underlying content and the collection method and input format of these tools. The flow of information, coordination, and support works as follows:

- Teachers enter these data into an online gradebooks, which syncs into our overall leadership dashboard for analysis across classrooms by our academic coordinator and principal.
- The academic coordinator is responsible for checking with teachers and providing whatever support is needed to ensure all data are entered on time. The coordinator also spot-checks input items to ensure they are accurate.
- At the classroom level, teachers are responsible for incorporating insights from data into their detailed weekly lesson plans, which are also reviewed by supervisors/coaches weekly, and then observed biweekly for fidelity of implementation.
- Teacher teams meet bi-weekly, led by our academic alignment team members, to review and compare student work samples across classes and to refine their approach.

---

<sup>10</sup> Squires, David, “Curriculum Alignment Research Suggests That Alignment Can Improve Student Achievement.” *The Clearing House*, 85: p129–135, 2012. Abstract accessed 10/18 at <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ965707> Full text available in hard copy on request.

<sup>11</sup> “When instruction aligns with assessment, large gains over a control group (instruction with no alignment) appeared across studies, with effect sizes ranging around four times what traditional instruction produced—effect sizes ranged from .25 to .50—or for instructionally aligned instruction and assessment, meaning that a student scoring in the 50th percentile would increase to between the 84th and 98th percentile.” Squires, 133. Here the meta-analysis substantiates its claim with references to other studies including, among others: Elia, J. S. I. 1986. “An alignment experiment in vocabulary instruction: Varying instructional practice and test item formats to measure transfer with low SES fourth graders.” Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of San Francisco. Cohen, S. A., and G. Stover. 1981. “Effects of teaching sixth grade students to modify the variables in math word problems.” *Reading Research Quarterly* 16: 175–200.

- School leadership monitors mastery on these tasks each week through the dashboard described previously.
- The academic coordinator conducts weekly meetings with instructional support staff, helps review and provide input on lesson plans to ensure alignment, and push-in support to provide model lessons in classrooms. After the testing window is complete and results returned, the academic coordinator and alignment team meet to reflect on areas of strength or weakness.

Teachers are also a major part of the loop of planning, implementation, and reflection in order to accelerate student growth. Our academic alignment team, led by our academic coordinator, includes several teacher-leaders, who have helped to create a scope and sequence of standards-aligned practice and formative assessment tasks that are now specifically integrated into the Montessori curriculum, and trained all teachers.

As outlined above, accountability for improvement is also built into employment structures and governance.

- The full board of trustees and executive director meet quarterly to review operations, while a program committee meets monthly to monitor progress with more frequency.
- All employees are evaluated three times/year by their managers. Alignment with the school vision and improvement plan, and the supports needed to succeed, are included in this evaluation.
- Classroom observations and coaching (30 minutes/each) occur at least once every two weeks.
- Professional development is offered for two hours/week and on 10+ days throughout the year. These sessions are for all teachers and staff, led by turnaround team members, focused on learning content and pedagogy to meet student needs.
- Child Study is a one hour program occurring every other week, for grade teams. A turnaround team member leads these discussions and facilitates making plans to ensure coordinated action for individual struggling students.

## **1.7 School Calendar and Schedule**

Our calendar includes 180 days for students. Our 415 daily minutes (excluding lunch) total 74,700 for the year, exceeding by 4,500 the Tennessee requirement, providing more time on task as well as banked days for inclement weather if needed.

Libertas' daily schedule, on the other hand, is extremely unique in order to maximize student focus. Much of students' academic time is spent in a ~3 hour interdisciplinary "work cycle," during which time students receive lessons individually or in small groups, and then choose work to practice from within a set of options planned by their teacher and tracked in a personal work journal. During this time, teachers alternate between giving lessons, checking on student work and giving feedback. This unique schedule allows the individualized needs of most students, including those receiving special education services, to be met in full inclusion classrooms (Libertas also has three self-contained classrooms for students with significant special needs, though those classrooms mostly follow the same model, with some adjustments for grouping or materials). Libertas employs assistant teachers in each class to support students working independently on their personalized learning goals while the teacher introduces new lessons to students who are ready. Additional support staff work with students in push-in and pull-out modes. Thus, students receive tiered instruction while participating in general education classrooms.

In addition to the Montessori work cycle, all students K-3rd also have a Core Knowledge Language Arts interactive readaloud session daily. As discussed above, 3rd grade students have a ~30 minute daily math seminar meeting, while fourth and fifth grade students have their math and ELA seminars in a separate classroom for one hour each.

All classes also have a 20-30 minute daily "community meeting," generally at the end of the morning work cycle, where the class has "virtue study" and "virtue circle" conversations: character and social-emotional development, using culturally and developmentally-responsive materials.

The best way to understand our schedule is through this description of a typical "day in the life" of a student:

### **7:35 The day begins.**

Doors open, and children arrive in their multi-age, multi-ability classrooms:

- Primary: age 3-6 (PreK and Kindergarten)
- Lower Elementary: age 6-9 (1st through 3rd)
- Upper Elementary: age 9-11 (3rd/4th to 5th)

Children enjoy free community breakfast in the classrooms.

### **8:00 - 11:00 Morning work cycle**

Our Montessori classrooms offer freedom and independence within a carefully structured environment.

- Montessori-trained lead teachers guide individual students through new lessons, based on student readiness. These lessons range from academics, like letters and sounds, to sensorial works that develop concentration and self-control. In between lessons, teachers observe children to see who needs more help, and who is ready to move on.
- Children choose the work they will practice within the lessons the teacher has given them. Students return to work until they have mastered that skill.



- Children can work with other students or independently. Children often work at small tables or even mats on the floor. Children quickly learn to respect each others' work.
- Children visit the library and find resources to research topics that interest them.

**11:00 - 11:30 Community meeting**

Read-aloud and a discussion of a wonderful [Virtue Study](#) story that brings to life character themes like honesty, self-control, gratitude, hope, friendship, and more.

**11:30 - 12:30 Lunch and recess**

Free, hot lunch available for every student.

Weather permitting, every student has free playtime in one of our three exciting playgrounds.

**12:30 - 3:00 p.m. Afternoon work cycle**

Students continue independent or group work. In addition, the afternoon work cycle may include the following focus areas:

- *Core Knowledge Language Arts*: "Listening and Learning" / *ELA Seminar*: a grade-level group session led by the teacher to help children learn about the world and develop communication skills. The group reads aloud, discusses, and writes about a piece of literature or nonfiction historical or scientific text.
- *Math seminar*: A small group session where the teacher walks students through solving a challenging, grade-level math problem together.
- *Classroom jobs*: Children develop responsibility by taking turns doing different tasks. These might include: feeding classroom pets, watering plants, sweeping, preparing snacks, cleaning up after meals, and organizing materials. Our students may be stewards of a particular shelf of materials or a student ambassador who might meet guests.
- *Special enrichment classes*: every student has PE and music twice per week for 30+ minutes. Students are also able to visit the library for independent research projects and/or to participate in books groups. We also usually offer periodic art and gardening classes (temporarily suspended due to pandemic-related staffing issues).

**3:00 - 3:15 Dismissal****3:15 - 5:45 After school academic and enrichment program***Student services and interventions*

Student services and tiered interventions are integrated throughout the school day in several ways. In full inclusion classes, we have dual licensed teachers who are able to provide IEP minutes in the class; in other classes, certified special education teachers provide push-in or pull-out support; in the upper elementary seminar classes, the special education teacher co-plans and co-teaches with the lead teacher to ensure inclusive access for children with disabilities. On the other hand, students in self-contained classes have regularly scheduled opportunities to work alongside typical peers, such as in jointly scheduled enrichment classes and lunch / recess periods. Our clinical therapists and RTI2 staff have pull-out groups that are scheduled to minimize disruption to students' concentration. Some of our clinicians, such as the physical therapist, work on a push-in basis, offering inclusive activities to everyone in the class, and not just those on the caseload, so as to minimize the feeling of exceptionality. Finally, our "AV team" (SEL and behavior support) operates a recovery room for students who need a place to re-engage and restore.



### *Summer programming*

For regular and summer program, Libertas follows the Montessori curriculum, which is academically rigorous, culturally rich, hands-on/ multisensory, and highly personalized—students receive most lessons individually or in small groups, and practice independently with the coaching of a teacher trained to deliver curriculum over a 3+ year age span.

For the summer of 2021, rather than only referring students to the local school district's program, Libertas designed and carried out its own summer program to comply with the Act ([2021 Public Chapter 1](#)).<sup>12</sup> Our offerings included summer learning, STREAM, and Bridge camps. Our summer program had 1 qualified teacher in each classroom, along with additional tutors. Classes always met the minimum 20 student:1 adult ratio, but typically maintained a 10 student:1 adult ratio that aligns more closely with our Montessori approach.

The Daily schedule during 2021 summer camp was Monday-Friday from 8am - 3pm (7hrs/day), and included:

- 4 hours/daily of group instruction (reading, math, science, social studies, and music)
- 1 hour/daily of individual interventions in areas of critical academic needs
- 1 hour/daily of play, physical education, music, and gardening
- +1 hour/optional aftercamp for additional time with STREAM subjects until 3pm
- Breakfast, lunch, and snack each day

Onboarding of tutors included a half day orientation prior to our summer session, with an overview of policies and procedures, meeting with teachers to review student information, and orientation on the curriculum and lessons they would support. Additionally, in order to best provide aligned tutoring instruction, tutors were able observe teachers on Montessori lessons each day and then assist with supervising small group practice and helping to individualize instruction as needed. Tutors were also provided with intervention time to deliver the supplementary TN Tutoring Corps curriculum as required. We were also pleased to offer STEAM enrichment programming through a partnership with Memphis' Pink Palace museum, and Latin thanks to one of our tutors.

Total combined spending on 2021 summer camp was roughly \$100k, including salaries and benefits for teachers and support staff; curriculum materials; summer camp supplies (notebooks, glue sticks, counters, school supplies, etc); books for independent reading; transportation for students in need. Furthermore, through a partnership with TN Tutoring Corps, Libertas received funds and passed through stipends for 5 TTC tutors.

Results and plans for the future: This year's summer program was a success. One child's example illustrates this. Last year, she was in Tier 3 reading interventions, and a struggling reader. But her attendance at camp was very good. Her tutor reported that she made great progress and that she was becoming a strong reader. Early in the 2021-22 school year, her classroom teacher reported that the child no longer needed pull-out reading support, as she is one of the highest readers in the class! This means participating in our summer program helped this child to bridge the gap and move from being a struggling student to a high performer. Attendance was strong in the first weeks but dipped in the final two weeks. This was likely attributable in part to the short summer (due to the late start of the year because of the pandemic). Instead of losing steam, our tutors leaned in and made effective use of time with the lower number of students.

We plan to provide the same programming in 2022. We are also extending high-dosage tutoring from the summer into the school year through a proposed participation in TN's All Corps.

---

<sup>12</sup> Much of the text in this section is copied verbatim from Libertas' TTC 2021 Final Report, submitted in October 2021.

## 1.8 Special Populations

Special populations at Libertas are overseen by our Student Support / Special Education coordinator Kaleigh Donnelly, who has over 15 years of experience as a special education teacher and administrator at both MCS and the ASD, and is in her 7th year in the role at our school. She oversees the referral, identification, development, implementation and reporting of IEPs. During her tenure Libertas has had an unblemished record of exceptionally good compliance, even with a large rate of IEPs. She supervises special education and intervention staff; serves on our academic support team to collaborate with other leaders; reports directly to our principal; and also coordinates regularly directly with our executive director on strategic initiatives related to special education. The current principal, Josh Shelley, is a certified teacher who has a strong record of working with special education students in the past. The co-founder and Executive Director, Bob Nardo, has substantial experience ensuring equitable resources for special education as well as supporting high-performing special educators in the legal, compliance, and data dimensions of their work. In addition to helping design charter-network wide special education staffing in the past, Nardo played a key role in forming the ASD's special education funding and service model. Another key member in this area is the Dean of our Attachment Village team, whose team includes a licensed Applied Behavior Analysis therapist and a licensed school counselor.

First it is necessary to clarify the significant scope of our work in this area. As noted above, using data from 2020 (the last fully comparable data set), we serve students with disabilities at approximately double the rate of students with special needs of SCS and the ASD. Libertas draws students with special needs from 37 different charter schools and neighborhood school zones. Of our 450+ students, over 100 have IEPs—nearly 24%, which is double the rate of the Memphis charter sector. Moreover, 10% of our students have a “high-need” disability, requiring 20 or more hours of specialized services per week. That figure is more than ten times the severity rate among charter schools in Memphis.

Special education population by subgroup			
Subgroup	Total enrolled	% SpEd	% high-need
SCS	106,000	11.5%	
SCS charters	16,000	9%	0.30%
ASD	10,000	13%	5%
Libertas	450	24%	9%

Special need classifications currently served at Libertas include: Autism | Developmental delay | Functional delay | Specific learning disabilities | Intellectual disability | Multiple disabilities | Other health impairments | Speech and language impairments | Emotional disturbance.

We also serve many social-emotional and trauma-informed behavior needs in our neighborhood, which is one of the two poorest census tracts in the state.

In the academic plan section we provided an overview of the Montessori model. Allow us to further elaborate its relevance for special education. Montessori classrooms feature multisensory materials and other multimodal ways both to access practice and demonstrate learning; individualized pacing of lessons; multi-age cohorts that enable peer learning (as well as diminish the appearance and stigmatization of differentiation based on ability); two faculty members in each class, allowing a lead teacher to provide individualized lessons while the assistant helps prepare the environment and redirect off-track students as needed; and more. All of these

attributes enable children to concentrate independently on the work of their development. And these practices facilitate inclusion and prevention. For instance, a child with sensory integration needs, who might in other instances be highly disruptive to other students because not yet able to cognitively process or verbally articulate their frustrations, has the opportunity to work with the many materials in our sensory curriculum, as well as receive clinical support, e.g. physical or occupational therapy in compensatory strategies. When even these options are not yet sufficient to meet a student's needs, our substantially separate placement enables children to practice working with Montessori materials with a smaller range of choices and peers, which could be potential distractions more than for typically abled peers. In this way it is meant to be an aspect of the least restrictive environment for children with particular disabilities.

Libertas' Tier 1 approach as a school includes many significant features that would be considered special interventions in most schools. But in addition, we have specific programs, practices, and strategies to meet special needs. These were described in Section 1.3 Academic Program. Our robust array of offerings earned the distinction of being named a special education program of excellence by national special education consultants.

Another practice worth highlighting is our Child Study model. Child Study is an interdisciplinary collaboration team that works with students who are not classified but who are struggling academically, behaviorally, developmentally, or otherwise in their classroom. Teachers refer children for Child Study. The team includes at least a veteran general education teacher, special educator, behavior specialist, and family engagement contact, and often other practitioners. The team will discuss student needs and develop potential interventions, which are then implemented and monitored in the coming weeks, and then the results are brought back to the team to debrief about whether the student is back on track or should be considered for escalated evaluation.

While we have not made any changes in philosophy since our charter, the specifics of this continuum of structures has evolved over the years since we were chartered.

If authorized by the Commission, we do not anticipate making any changes to the services provided or the staffing and procedures currently being employed to help students with disabilities succeed. Libertas does not currently rely on SCS for services. We have mostly in-house staff, use an independent school psychologist for evaluations and partner with Lebonheur Children's Hospital, Southern College of Optometry, UT Health Science Center, Anaya / Youth Villages, and other partners for services.

Our unique model and array of supports is not only attracting families from across Memphis but also resulting in academic success and reducing the achievement gap for a significant population of students with disabilities. As noted above, our students with disabilities have grown equal to or faster than their typical peers on the NWEA MAP test every single year, and are now achieving proficiency in the top 15% compared to their subgroup across the state. We will continue to improve inclusion while accelerating growth for some of the most vulnerable—and highest potential—children in Tennessee.

### *Staffing*

In order to implement content-rich, individually-paced, multisensory Montessori learning plus a continuum of services, we have the following team:

- Student Support / Special Education Coordinator to coordinate all staff, data, and processes
- 7 certified special education teachers
- 5 paraprofessional / special education assistants

- Clinical therapy:
  - 1.5 FTE speech language pathologist
  - part-time OT and PT
  - contracted psychologist
- Social-emotional & behavior support (our “Attachment Village” team):
  - Dean and associate dean proactively and reactively implement restorative practices and operate our recovery space;
  - Applied behavior analyst; also Applied Behavior Analysis intern through University of Memphis’ ABA clinic
  - social worker (previously employed full-time; currently consulting);
  - licensed counselor through partnership with Anaya / Youth Villages to provide intensive individual and group therapy
  - Full-time nurse, who also coordinates with several health service agency partners for medical, vision, hearing, dental and related screenings and interventions (e.g. glasses, immunizations, etc).

In addition to these directly special education related staff, we also have the following team members:

- Family engagement coordinator conducts dozens of opportunities, in various accessible formats
- Intervention teachers to provide Tier 3 instruction in ELA and Math

Special education assistant teachers / paraprofessionals are key to our success with students with disabilities. We provide these staff with thorough training in both Montessori pedagogy and special education, so that they can do much more than monitor students. Our team is able to support meaningful individual and small-group practice in large swaths of our curriculum as well as social-emotional support and other aspects of IEPs.

### *Monitoring*

Libertas monitors its effectiveness serving students with disabilities, English learners, at-risk, and gifted students through the same goal setting, monitoring, and performance management cycle as outlined above.

- For every key goal listed above (e.g., lesson planning, growth on internal curriculum-based measures and nationally normed assessments, proficiency on state test, reduction of repeated behavior referrals, suspensions, family engagement, etc.), we monitor the the special education subgroup data in comparison to the overall population, to ensure there is no gap, and if so that there is a plan to address
- IEP goals: Students reach IEP goals for foundational and grade-level skills
- Inclusion: In accordance with IEPs, increase the % of SwD, and the portion of the day for each SwD, in the least restrictive environment.

## **English Language Learners**

Currently, Libertas has zero ELLs. As a neighborhood school, the population of non-English speaking families in our immediate neighborhood is extremely low. However our Student Supports coordinator is a certified ESL instructor. When our enrollment process identifies an ELL via the home language survey, it triggers our process for ELLs, including all of the strategies, policies, supports, and assessments, including WIDA screener.

### *Identification*

Libertas will work with any enrolled English Language Learner (ELL) students in accordance with related Federal Laws and Regulations in order to support students in receiving a free and appropriate public education as defined by Tennessee education law.<sup>13</sup> As described by the Tennessee State Board of Education's ESL Program, families will indicate the native language of all students on an initial home language survey. If any of the answers on the survey are languages other than English, the child will be classified as Non-English Language Background (NELB) and assessed for English proficiency using an approved screening assessment for ESL (currently the W-APT). Screening will be conducted within the student's first month of enrollment, or 10 days if mid-year, so that services may begin with those timeframes. All NELB students who are determined to be LEP must be identified as ELL, and ESL services must be provided through an allowable service delivery model.

### *Language instruction and equal access*

All Libertas special needs and LEP students will receive instruction in a mainstream environment. Libertas teachers will receive training in areas such as vocabulary development and guided language acquisition strategies that impact the achievement of native English speakers as well as English Language Learners. Instructions for ELLs are those suggested in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model. The goal of this model is to develop English language skills together with academic skills. Content instruction will be provided in English, and ELL students will be taught the same academic content as those who are native English speakers. The individual lessons and differentiated instruction of our Montessori design support this model since they allow students to spend the amount of time needed on each stage of learning before moving on to the next. Multi-age groups provide children with the opportunity to interact with children whose English is more advanced. Partner work, peer tutors, and lessons in small groups give students opportunities to communicate in English. Students whose rights to services have been waived will still be able to make the most of our self-paced classrooms for these reasons. If a student with waiver ELL services is working in a given area for an unusually prolonged time, the teacher will consult with the family whether waived services are still the best option. Students who are T1 and T2 status will receive services through pull-out and push-in sessions with the ELL teacher, but will also be able to work independently in the classroom environment. The ELL teacher will meet periodically during our weekly faculty meeting window with general education teachers whose classrooms include ELL students, in order to integrate ESL curriculum options in the classroom.

### *Evaluation*

In accordance with NCLB requirements, the English language proficiency of all students who are ELL will be measured annually as part of school and district accountability. Libertas will administer the WIDA to ELL students on an annual basis to evaluate their English proficiency. Scores indicate the proficiency level the student has achieved each year, and whether the student's level of English proficiency is high enough to exit the ELL program or support services. With support of the ELL teacher, the lead classroom teacher of any ELL student will be in charge of monitoring the progress and success of the student (including the possibility of

---

<sup>13</sup> Tennessee Rules and Regulations: Rule 0520-1-3-.056. a. 1 and 2 ii.

successfully exiting services), both in general content and skills acquisition, and in mastery of the four areas of language proficiency (reading, writing, speaking and listening). If a student who is an ELL fails to show sufficient progress in academic areas, based on WIDA, TCAP or other tests, the Child Study team will reevaluate the academic program and level of language support.

#### *Family communications and engagement*

According to Tennessee education policy 3.207, the school must notify the parents of LEP students (in writing, and in the home language) of the fact that their child has been identified as eligible for enrollment in a bilingual, ESL, or English language services education program. English language progress reports will be sent to parents of enrolled LEP students along with the school's quarterly progress reports. Both reports would be sent home in English as well as the home language (for which we would need to identify capable staff or a translation service, if we encounter conditions substantially different than what current data suggest is likely). The ELL teacher will ensure that parents of identified children are specially invited to participate in parent education opportunities.

#### *Staffing and service*

Though we currently have no EL students, we have one qualified ESL teacher on faculty. Eligible ELLs would receive one hour of formal instruction per day, five days per week. Ratio will not exceed 1:10.



## 1.9 School Culture and Discipline

We do not anticipate any changes to the Handbook (other than the sections already noted dealing with enrollment policies—namely, removal of the priority zone guarantee and preference) if authorized by the Charter Commission. (The Student Handbook is part of the Family Handbook, Attachment B.)

We also do not anticipate any changes to the student discipline policy if authorized by the Charter Commission.

### Philosophy and Design

Libertas' culture grows out of our mission to cultivate the minds, hands, and hearts of children in Memphis for lives of wonder, work, and love.

Children misbehave in school for many reasons. Maybe they had a bad night's sleep, a fight with a sibling, or no breakfast; maybe they feel unprepared and want to avoid the appearance of failure; maybe they feel powerless and need some measure of control. Immature persons acting-out for these reasons do not need to be criminalized, but rather welcomed, provided rest, nutrition, physical and emotional safety, and firmly supported to be their best selves.

The foundation of our culture is to tend the heart through an “attachment village” of love. We engage families in proactive relationship building, to earn their trust, and reduce the communication barriers that often make it difficult for families who are experiencing trauma or adverse childhood experiences to seek help or work with the school on barriers their children may face in accessing school. We host dozens of parent events at different convenient times and formats, including many that are parent-led conversations about issues important to them (i.e. not only presentations by the school). Our two-adult per classroom staffing model means smaller staff:student ratios. Our multi-age groupings mean that children “loop” with the same teacher(s) for up to three years in a row, significantly deepening home to school connections. They also allow children to look up to “older friends” or model for “younger friends” in their class. In all of these ways, attachment relationships are the basis of our school culture.



Upon that basis sits our core program: meaningful work through the Montessori model. As we have demonstrated, Montessori is clearly a strong academic approach, but what makes it truly exceptional is that it is a comprehensive model of human development. As described above, children in Montessori classrooms are motivated by a sense of purpose, which helps them to integrate and focus their faculties and overcome the disorder that more often than not characterizes children who lack something to do! Therefore we provide significant opportunities for individual choice of meaningful work in our classrooms, as well as plenty of physical movement for our young children who are still organizing their bodies. These features dramatically reduce the willpower struggles that characterize so many behavior confrontations in schools.

Other design aspects of the Montessori classroom are conducive to habituating positive culture. Children do most of their work on individual work mats or rugs that delineate their space and help others learn to navigate around them. Proper use of a work mat is just one of the “lessons in grace and courtesy” that children receive and practice; the sequence ranges from how to wipe your nose and wash your hands to how to close a door quietly. Limited numbers of certain materials mean that children either share or take turns. Real materials—fine-grained wood tables that the children, metal that they can polish, glass pitchers of water that they carefully carry across the room (and wipe or sweep up themselves if they spill or break!)—convey that we believe in their ability to have responsibility.

Students also have jobs that invest in caring for their classroom and school environment. Students water and prune plants, prepare their own snack and clean up after themselves, compost their leftovers and add to the school garden, where they grow flowers they use to decorate the room, or vegetables that they bring home to their families. Over the years our school has kept chickens, and recently became home to a pair of milk goats, which the children can help to take care of. Thus empowered to master their environment, children become intrinsically motivated—dramatically reducing reliance on extrinsic behavior consequences (i.e., there are no letter grades) for performance. In all these ways, children habituate social-emotional skills and character through the work of the hand.

Finally, we inspire the mind. Whom shall I be like? What kind of life should I lead? What is really worth my effort and what is a counterfeit I shouldn't settle for? How will I get through this? Who will love me? These are fundamental human questions that our students are just beginning to explore. We guide students in the spirit of Maria Montessori, who read epic poetry aloud to children, by surrounding them with the images and stories of great literary and historical exemplars of excellence—images of the beauty and happiness that are intrinsic to virtue (or their opposites).

Every week Libertas teachers read folk tales, fairy tales, poetry, and other literature to students, in a specific sequence designed to present compelling images of key virtues—habits of excellence that constitute human flourishing.<sup>14</sup> Our selections emphasize always the best in literary and artistic quality. Because people are inextricably bound up with the communities they come from, we help students recognize and live out their duties to those who came before us and those will come after us, by drawing materials from across world cultures, but especially from our community's African American heritage.

Children are inspired by the the biographies of American heroes like Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglass; delighted by the timeless tales of Aeso (himself an enslaved person), Anansi and Brer

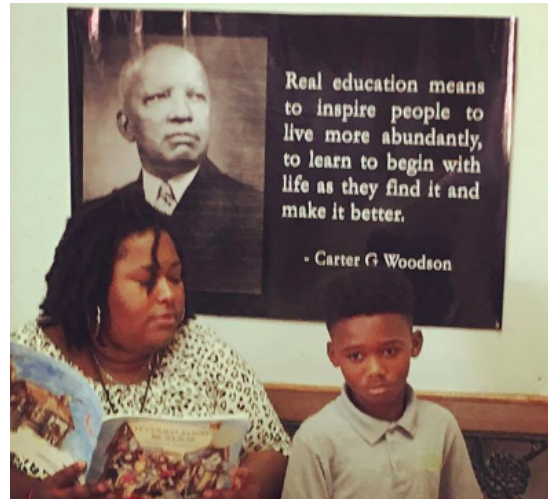
---

<sup>14</sup> An overview of our sequence can be found at <https://www.libertasmemphis.org/curriculum-enrichment>

Rabbit; and empowered by hearing, memorizing, and reciting at our annual celebration the brilliant poetry of Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, or Phillis Wheatley.

Classrooms are named and decorated for persons such as Louis Armstrong, the astronaut Mae Jemison, early black-owned media executives like John and Eunice Johnson, and living heroes like Curtis Pride, the black man who was the first deaf Major League Baseball player. Complementing these “impressionistic” modes of fostering character, we also have a “didactic” curriculum to translate virtues into everyday practices in the classroom.

“Virtue circles” is a sequence of conversations, activities, and games conducted in weekly classroom circle meetings, to help children think about and practice self-control, gratitude, honesty, and so forth. Through it we also teach a Montessori approach to peer conflict resolution at the “peace table.” And because you cannot give what you do not have, our teachers and staff are also formed in virtue through monthly literature seminar discussions, with selections ranging from the aforementioned children’s literature to Shakespeare to Carter G. Woodson or the oratory of Martin Luther King. In all these ways, students—and their teachers—have worthy targets at which to aim, and great words with which to express themselves.



Monthly virtue themes:

August	<b>Grace &amp; Courtesy:</b> Treat people as important.
September	<b>Honesty:</b> Say what you know is true.
	<b>Prudence:</b> Choose the right way to do the right thing.
October	<b>Temperance:</b> P: Self-control   When enough is enough.
November	<b>Gratitude:</b> Give thanks for what we receive.
December	Love as <b>Generosity:</b> Give without thinking of getting.
January	<b>Fortitude:</b> Work hard, be brave, don't quit!
February	<b>Justice:</b> Everyone gets what they should.
March	<b>Loyalty:</b> Stick together even when it is hard.
	<b>Forgiveness:</b> Let go of hurt.
April	<b>Wonder:</b> Learn with joy.
	<b>Hope:</b> Believe in what you don't have yet.
May	Love as <b>Friendship:</b> We're better together

\* For our literature for each week, see Attachment B1.

*Tier strategies for behavior*

Wonder, work, and love are our three, "Tier 1," macro strategies for school culture.

Consistent with our principles, we also have a Tier 2 approach to persistent or significant behavior challenges is restorative discipline. If something is broken—be it a classroom material or a friendship—we need to fix it. Not only do we train our teachers and assistants in restorative practices, but they are also the spirit for interventions by our Attachment Village (behavior and social-emotional support) team and the recovery room that they operate. Often working in tandem with the Child Study team (interdisciplinary intervention steering group discussed above), the AV team provides push-in, pull-out, and family engagement support for relationship and behavior needs.

Children receive extra help with self-calming, de-escalation, peacemaking, and restoration. The team is trained in attachment-based approaches, trauma-informed care, the "Love and Logic" toolkit, and Montessori pedagogy, as well as other methods like Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)—bringing all of them together to "follow the child." Finally, our tier 3 approach may include a FBA (Functional Behavior Assessment) and BIP (Behavior Intervention Plan), either developed by our internal team or through our partnership with the University of Memphis' ABA clinic. We have both licensed social workers and school counselors available to provide therapy and other related services and/or referrals for out-of-school services (such as through our partnership with Anaya / Youth Villages, the premier local experts in this field.)

Just as with academic data, we set goals and constantly monitor various qualitative and quantitative indicators of school culture via our data dashboard. We know our approach is successful in part because of our consistently high survey satisfaction rates among both teachers and parents, as well as our dramatically reduced incidences of exclusionary discipline: in a school just seven years ago had approximately 25% suspensions (in a neighborhood where the rates can be double that!), we have less than one-fourth that rate,





and zero expulsions in seven years. There are also state and national data points about the efficacy of our approach. Researchers for the 2015-2019 statewide Preschool Development Grant initiative found that Libertas had *half* the average rate of teacher intervention in student behavior in the classroom. Also, in 2017-18 Libertas participated in a yearlong, schoolwide pilot of the Minnesota Executive Function Scale. According to the researchers who designed it, "MEFS assesses the neurocognitive foundations for learning literacy, math, and social-emotional learning skills. And it predicts performance outcomes in these content areas. It 'measures what matters' for school readiness and future knowledge acquisition." Over the course of the pilot, our students grew by 5 national percentiles in executive functioning, closing the gap with middle-income peers nationwide in their concentration and inhibitory control.

### *Challenges*

As discussed above, there is substantial evidence of the success of our approach. In a sense, given how much the neighborhood is accustomed to exclusionary discipline, the biggest challenge has been reorienting everyone around a culture of restorative practices.

It is doubtless faster, cheaper, and may seem more just to simply punish offenders and send them away for a while. It is slow, time-consuming, expensive in terms of staff time, and demanding on everyone's patience to work through incidents and restore relationships.

We have always deliberately referred to our paradigm as the Attachment Village, rather than something like behavior intervention, to reinforce that our context is emotional and relationship development. And that, while order must be maintained here and now, we have to focus on long-term development: and in that context, treatment of symptoms is simply not enough; we must be empowered by loving guides to practice a more perfect way of living in community. Eventually, all of us—even the aggrieved party—will need the grace to try again.

What has changed over the years is the expansion of the team to help students, teachers, and families all participate in this big work of emotional growth. We have 3+ full-time members of the team with complementary skill sets, as well as other consultants. Together they are helping our school to grow in size without losing the personal dynamic needed to maintain a coherent culture.

### *Integrating new students*

As explained in the Enrollment section above, Libertas does not anticipate significant changes to our numbers or demographics upon transitioning out from the ASD's enrollment methods.

Integrating new students into our culture has always been a question for a school as unique as Libertas. In some ways it is a big change, especially for older elementary students who are accustomed to teacher-directed, whole-group work. The need for a lot of older student acclimation is limited by our large pipeline at early grades, and excellent annual persistence. But even for those who enter late, our multi-age, multi-ability classrooms soon prove conducive to acculturation: the culture is so strong that it provides a positive peer pressure, and more to the point peers are able to help instruct newcomers in the use of rugs, work mats, etc. Some new students are given temporary differentiated schedules or work plans that include more structure such as an assigned seat. Finally, we have one elementary classroom that has a slightly smaller class size to allow it to specialize in acclimating late entrants

### **1.10 Recruitment and Enrollment**

Application, lottery, waitlist, withdrawal, transfer, and related procedures are addressed in the Family Handbook. In accordance with State rules, we have an initial enrollment period during which current families are assured of the opportunity to re-enroll. We work hard to utilize this opportunity to ensure that at-risk families in particular are assured of their spots, and generally have more than 80% of current students re-enroll at that time. At the end of the initial period we estimate the number of available seats per grade level, and proceed to admit new students, proceeding sequentially through allowable preference groups.

Our current enrollment policy indicates that dates for application period and lottery are posted on our website annually. That has not yet occurred for 2022. For this past year, the initial application period opened on January 28 and the lottery was on March 1, 2021. At this time we expect to use those same dates in 2022.

We remain committed to non discriminatory admissions under TN law, and at this time are meticulously careful to validate applicant information so that enrollment rules are applied fairly — e.g. guarantee for those with documented residency in our zone or preference for those in other priority zones (the only two changes we expect to make if approved by the Commission), along with other allowable preferences for siblings, and children of faculty/staff. To reduce hidden barriers to access, we do not have onerous pre-admission activities; we do require a family orientation, but work to accommodate all schedules.

A school's relationship with its authorizer is very important, but Libertas' leadership team and board have learned through years of operating and overseeing charter schools—including the entry of many schools from SCS into the ASD—that families generally have very limited visibility or even awareness of the authorizer (unless, of course, the school struggles to meet commitments and an authorizer intervenes to rectify the situation). In fact, spending too much time talking about authorization may unnecessarily worry parents, or distract from where they can have the biggest impact for their children. Parents' primary focus is on their children's educational experience.

Nevertheless, Libertas is anxious to preserve its ability to serve the families of Frayser to the greatest extent practical and allowable. Therefore we are committed to helping our families understand what a transition from the ASD means for enrollment. We have already held several meetings with different groups of parents to discuss implications and brainstorm solutions.

If Libertas is authorized by the Charter Commission, all parents will be informed about the change in a letter, social media posts, and optional question-and-answer meetings. Parents will be engaged to help spread the news to other families, particularly how we will need to ensure families in the Brookmeade zone and other Frayser area priority zones need to apply early to maximize their access, rather than waiting on the expiring assumption that residency will ensure preference.

#### *Student recruitment and retention*

Enrollment, retention, and recruitment are complex for ASD schools. However, Libertas has strong enrollment that is not dependent on the geographic zone previously designed by SCS. In 2021, for example, we significantly exceeded our enrollment goal of 465 with over 485 registered students. And, as of this application, we have over 120 students on our waiting list (approximately 20 per grade).





As an ASD school Libertas guarantees enrollment to students from a certain zone. But, Libertas has never relied on district zoning assignments to meet enrollment goals. The first reason Libertas has not relied on the geographic zone is that we knew going in that the Brookmeade zone had always been small. The zone yielded only about 60 children per grade even when operated by MCS/SCS prior to transformation. That left the school only 2/3 full. Moreover, the Brookmeade/Libertas zone has been essentially gone for some time. Within two years of SCS' Brookmeade Elementary becoming Libertas in the ASD, SCS advertised new zones for students living in the area previously zoned to Brookmeade. So, for many years, Libertas has operated without the kind of advantage that might appear to have been in place after taking over a zoned school building. Even though SCS created these new zones, Libertas has continued to honor eligibility of students based on the zone in place, as well as other priority zones as they existed at the time of our contract, pursuant to statute and ASD policy.

With those realities in mind, Libertas has (since inception) taken a proactive approach to marketing and outreach to ensure that families in the Brookmeade zone and other priority zones throughout Frayser and adjoining areas know and are excited about Libertas as *a public school of choice*.

When we opened in 2015, virtually all students came from our zone and immediately adjacent priority zones in Frayser. Over the course of seven years, interest in our school has grown such that now approximately 15-20% of registered students come from neighborhoods adjacent to Frayser—primarily the low-income, predominantly African American neighborhoods of Raleigh and North Memphis, but also more economically and racially diverse areas in midtown Memphis.

In addition to strong applications, Libertas also has a higher-than-neighborhood-average student persistence rate of approximately 75% among PreK students and 82% for students in grades K and above. (The slight difference is explained by the fact that PreK has not been universally available and thus some children come to our school for PreK and return to other schools closer to home for elementary grades.)

*Attrition and backfilling:* We currently “backfill” vacancies either up to our enrollment goal and/or for neighborhood students eligible for guaranteed admission midyear. (Evidence of our effectiveness at proactively engaging zoned families is that, throughout each year, only a small handful (single digits) of additional zoned enrollment students are currently added as needed throughout the year, e.g. when a new family moves into the community.) Our goal allows for some dropoff as grade levels advance because our strategy is to maximize opportunities for early childhood education, leaving fewer seats in older grades. At the point when we are no longer a zoned school, we would backfill from our wait list up to our budgeted enrollment.

*PreK:* While the PreK program provided at Libertas is not governed by the Tennessee Charter School Act, some background is provided here because of its significant role at the base of our school's program philosophy, as well as our enrollment and financial model. Libertas serves a significant PreK population (90-100 students per year), primarily through a contract with First 8 Memphis, which is a nonprofit fiscal agent for a multi-year partnership between the City of Memphis, Shelby County government, and national funding partners. This contract is designed to replace the federal Preschool Development Grant pilot with universal income-eligible PreK in Shelby County. Libertas is a partner in good standing, as indicated by the letter of support from First 8 included in our application. We have also historically served one class per year through the state's Voluntary PreK (VPK) program, which we hope to continue as well.

#### *Potential shifts from different authorization*

Between our strong early childhood program, plus ample applications from our target community of Frayser and adjoining areas, plus strong persistence, we have more students than we can currently serve, and expect enrollment to continue that way regardless of potential change in authorization.

Still, we are mindful of the increased number of students who will be eligible to attend Libertas should it become a Commission-authorized school. Libertas will do everything possible to ensure it can continue primarily serving the Frayser neighborhood. After consultation public charter schools in Nashville and Cleveland and the [Diverse Charter Schools Coalition](#), we anticipate emphasizing the following practices:

- Conduct extra marketing efforts to cultivate demand, such as partnering with community day cares, community development organizations, and hosting community focused events. This specifically includes extra outreach to invite nearby families to decide school choices earlier in the year than they're used to doing. That work will benefit from the strong existing relationships with parents and neighborhood leaders (including those serving on our board).
- Ensure the timing of any necessary lottery allows the school to adequately prepare to meet unique student needs.
- Maintaining the existing wait list and adding to it in the future. That way, families who are currently connected while Libertas has a neighborhood preference will be the first offered openings that occur throughout the year.

Libertas does not anticipate student attrition due to being authorized by the Charter Commission. Ultimately SCS will make its own determination about how to handle the school zone we have operated. However, from conversations with SCS administrators and board members, we do not expect them to attempt to re-establish a zoned school where we have been operating. They have already attempted to redirect zoned families to other schools in the region to the extent possible. They have expressed both publicly and privately wanting to reduce their number of under enrolled facilities with significant amounts of deferred maintenance. More importantly, SCS recognizes that Libertas is effectively serving this community

### **1.11 Parent and Community Engagement and Support**

Parents' first question about potential transition was about the integrity of Libertas' academic model. Since the Commission would continue to honor Libertas' charter program, this is not of concern. A related question was about funding. We shared with parents the advantages of Commission authorization in this aspect—e.g. pass through of various federal and state grants—as well as the challenges—e.g. potential lag year of federal grant amounts based on demographics. Altogether we believe we are doing the best we can at this stage.

The next two points both relate to our ability to honor our vision of serving our neighborhood. The first is our ability to stay in our building. We reviewed the provisions in the law for the minimum window to stay here; we also discussed the different facility provisions under different authorization scenarios, and this seems at least as strong. The final point of discussion in our engagement with families has been how we can stay true to the neighborhood in enrollment. The section immediately above reflects our efforts to address these concerns.

What the shift would mean for Libertas has been discussed by the board throughout its strategic planning meetings in Spring 2021. We also had more direct conversation with board members—including multiple parents—at their October 18, 2021 full board meeting, and at a board committee session on November 1, 2021.

A group of highly engaged parents of 11 students were invited to a meeting on October 26, 2021. At that meeting, the potential shift to the Charter Commission was described and then parents shared their feelings, concerns, and questions. The parents also provided feedback to school leadership and were given a primary contact at the school to share additional questions, concerns, or feedback. A similar meeting with open attendance was held with several more parents on November 4.

We do not anticipate significant changes to Libertas' parent and community engagement strategy if authorized by the Charter Commission. Libertas will continue to work closely with the nonprofit organizations, churches, local government agencies, and other community partners that have been important to our success thus far. The main changes in our interaction with parents and the community will be in our recruitment strategy, as mentioned above, to ensure we are able to primarily serve the Frayser neighborhood despite being open to all students residing in the boundaries of SCS. We have already demonstrated an effective ability with the help of our partnerships to reach our neighborhood even without an apparent zone.

#### *Parent and community engagement*

Libertas works to systematically dismantle structural and psychological obstacles to parent engagement. Please see the culture section above for more discussion of some of our “attachment village” philosophy and practices. In short, we run parent engagement like a political campaign, carefully designing a variety of accessible formats for parents to get involved in, tracking who engages in what in order to better “turn out” people in the future. Just some examples of our dozens of annual opportunities include classroom volunteering, chaperoning trips to museums or art exhibits, substantive presentations on child development, hands-on workshops with curriculum materials, family fun and social events like game nights. Some of our most unique sessions empower parents to set the agenda and discuss issues of concern—from what time children go to bed at night, or how much TV they can watch, to whether they allow older siblings to date. Libertas registers parents to vote and brings parents to testify at local and State government hearings. Ultimately our strategy is to foster trusting relationships so that we can collaborate about student needs, and empower parents with knowledge to be their best for children.

We monitor our success in family engagement through a systematic, data-driven approach such as described above. Led by a family engagement coordinator and supervised by the director of operations, our goals include

- maintain 90% participation
- increasing the participation rate for families of chronically absent or suspended students by 10%
- 95% satisfaction
- 80% homework completion
- Reduce chronic absenteeism (AMO goal to be announced)

To this end, we offer a minimum of two engagement opportunities per month, with a diversity of times (morning, afternoon, evening, weekend) over the course of the year, as well as a variety of formats (presentations, volunteering, peer parent collaboration, etc).

A particular area of engagement is around chronic absenteeism. In the first month of each year, we identify an initial caseload of families with students at risk to support based on prior year data, and reach out for initial contact. Then we engage in the following routine of activities:

- Daily: Check for consecutive absences and contact families as needed,
- Weekly: (Monday by 9am), review last week's data for attendance, homework, and behavior referrals, to identify families off-track for potential interventions.
- Monthly:
  - Conduct 10 family interventions, in-person at school or home, and maintain records of referrals and follow-up for support services.
  - Participate in Child Study Team meetings to collaborate with teachers on other needs or family engagement strategies.
  - Offer incentives for attendance and homework.
  - Convene family engagement team meetings to review family participation data and flag low-involvement families for individualized outreach.
- At least semi-annually: (mid-October and Mid-March) hold parent-teacher conferences. Goal: 90% parent participation and 90% satisfaction.

At the beginning of the school year, we hold a 2-hour training session on trauma-informed child engagement, to help our teachers better understand the home issues that are confronting many students. Teachers are also involved on an ongoing basis as needed in twice-monthly Child Study Team meetings to help strategize interventions for behavior, attendance, homework, and engagement needs.

In addition to this intensive family engagement effort, Libertas is also highly involved in our community. We have close partnerships with numerous entities in our neighborhood; the list below includes just a few partners and what they provide. These partnerships are led primarily by our Executive Director and our Board members, with support from members of our Family/Community engagement team.

- Frayser Community Development Corporation: affordable housing (rental and purchase assistance); financial planning
- Frayser Exchange Club: relationship building and advocacy
- Ed Rice Community Center & North Frayser Community Center
- Frayser Library: library cards, black history programming
- First 8 Memphis & Seeding Success: collaboration and resources around early childhood
- Girls' Inc: programming support

- Anaya / Youth Villages: mental health referrals, counseling, and crisis support
- LeBonheur Children's Hospital: clinical therapy
- Urban Child Institute: research; philanthropic support of
- UT Health Science Center: health education, screenings, and services
- University of Memphis, ABA clinic; Child Development & Family Studies Dept: interns, staff recruitment
- Memphis Symphony Orchestra: music education, performances
- Pursuit of God Transformation Center: community venue, grassroots outreach / enrollment
- Alco apartments: grassroots outreach / enrollment; corporate philanthropic support
- Legacy of Legends CDC: ACEs/trauma informed response
- Lifeline to Success (ex offender re-entry program): student mentorship
- Shelby County Commission: community enhancement grant program

Communication to parents and partners of changes related to the Commission were addressed in an earlier section.

## **SECTION 2: OPERATIONS PLAN AND CAPACITY**

### **2.1 Governance**

We have built a board of directors that draws upon the strength of our community. The board is currently composed of 8 voting members, plus Libertas' Executive Director as an ex-officio, non-voting member. The board includes:

- 2 parents of Libertas' students,
- 6 Memphis natives,
- 3 residents or business owners from Frayser or the surrounding neighborhoods,
- 5 current or former educators in both K-12 and postsecondary education,
- 4 women and 4 men,
- 4 African-Americans,
- 1 United States Navy veteran,
- 1 former charter school network leader, and
- 1 former Montessori school director

In order to accomplish its vision of a personalized, liberal arts education, cultivation of virtue, and an attachment village, Libertas' board purposefully includes members with broad and deep experience in the following areas:

- Early childhood development, K-12 education (including Montessori), and postsecondary education
- Community engagement and development, including housing redevelopment and employment
- School, business, and government agency leadership,
- Accounting, finance, and law, and
- Political leadership, advocacy, and communications.

Each board member serves on at least one committee. Standing committees currently include: Executive Committee (formerly Performance Review), Finance Committee, Program Committee, Advocacy/Advancement Committee; we also have an ad hoc Grievance Committee.

At the present time we have two additional community members who serve on committees but are not full board members.

The executive director (ED) reports to the governing board. Each fall the ED submits proposed goals to the Board's Executive Committee, which discusses, modifies if needed, and recommends those goals to the full board for ratification. The ED then submits a self-evaluation—using a template and goals approved by the Board—at both the mid-year and end-of-year points, each of which again is reviewed by the Executive Committee and reported back to the full Board for ratification. The Board has adopted a policy about executive compensation, which is updated each summer in alignment with the evaluation.

After almost seven years of operating the school (plus 18 months during the planning period), Libertas' board of trustees is operating at a steady state. Board members have served and will continue to serve as officers and on relevant committees.



Libertas has had at all times in its history a sufficient complement of board and committee members. We have had a healthy life cycle that generally proceeds with a new person first joining a committee, demonstrating their commitment and ability, and then often being promoted to the full board, where they continue as long as their other commitments permit, and then finally referring us to others in their network to cultivate as possible successors in advance of departure.

Libertas purposefully monitors the board composition to ensure its members provide the school with visionary leadership, oversight, and strategic support. Specifically, the board chairman touches base individually with each board member each year to verify their continued commitment or discuss a transition if needed. We do not presently anticipate any board members leaving before their terms expire.

Board members agree to written expectations to foster the board's capacity and the school's success through oversight, networking, advocacy, and financially. Members are expected to identify, cultivate, and introduce at least one new person to Libertas each year (a potential teacher/staff member, donor, board member, government official, volunteer, etc.). Board members are prepared to communicate with public officials and advocate for their support of the school. Board members are asked to make a meaningful financial gift to the school year year, and, as needed, provide expert advice, attend special events, and encourage faculty, students, and their families.

#### *Board training*

Libertas is registered through the Tennessee Charter School Center to use Board Smart to complete this year's Board of Trustee training and certification requirements, pursuant to [Tennessee Code Annotated 49-13-111\(q\)](#), which requires that all board members participate in four or six hours of training and receive certification through the Tennessee Charter School Center annually.

Libertas registered for Board Smart on July 21, 2021. All members of the board have completed the required hours of training before the certification documents deadline of November 15, 2021. Progress is tracked through the Tennessee Charter School Center.

#### *Complaints*

Anyone may contact the board by phone and email. Numbers and email addresses are posted on the website. Board policy is that most concerns can only be heard by the Board after they have been addressed to the administration. The parent and community grievance policy, inserted below, is included in the Family Handbook (Attachment B, C, D). If authorized by the Commission, Libertas would modify this procedure to incorporate the Commission pursuant to [Commission Policy 1200. Grievances and Complaints](#).

**Libertas Family Handbook 13.1 Process:** The ASD considers parent and community support and input vital to school accountability and success. If a Libertas parent or other community member has a concern, they should use the following procedure.

*First, directly contact the relevant school faculty or staff member:* Please communicate any concerns or complaints directly to the teacher or staff member with whom you have a concern. Please assume that the person may not know about your concern until you have clearly conveyed it.

*Second, escalate your concern to relevant leaders:* If the individual staff member with which you communicated was unable to resolve your concern, please contact the head of school or designee, verbally or



in writing, at 901-609-3611 or [info@LibertasMemphis.org](mailto:info@LibertasMemphis.org) or 3777 Edenburg Dr, Memphis TN 38127. Most concerns can be resolved at the school level.

*Third, if school leaders are unable to resolve your concern, contact our Board of Trustees:* Libertas School is governed by a nonprofit Board of Trustees, and is subject to oversight by its authorizer, the ASD. The Board of Trustees is the legal entity with authority to provide final oversight for administrators in decisions such as staffing, school programs, use of time, discipline, support services, etc. The Chairman of our board is able to receive and direct to the board committee's attention any grievances from parents or students that were not satisfactorily resolved by school staff. Families may contact these board members at [info@LibertasMemphis.org](mailto:info@LibertasMemphis.org). The board also meets publicly on a regular basis. Please note that the Board will generally not hear grievances that have not first been channeled through school staff.

*Fourth, contact the ASD:* If a parent has a concern that a school has violated the law, applicable district policy, a charter contract or student safety responsibilities, and parents' efforts to solve the problem directly with school leadership and board of trustees fails to satisfactorily address a parent's concern, then the parent may appeal to the ASD for assistance resolving the issue. When warranted, the ASD may engage external authorities to investigate and/or address an issue. Please note that, for most concerns, the ASD does not have authority to overturn the decisions of charter school boards regarding student services and staff. If warranted, the sole actions that the ASD has the authority to take beyond informing and influencing a charter operator to resolve an inadequately addressed Tennessee statute-defined violation on its own are to modify the expansion or replication of a school or revoke the charter.

Where a concern involves a criminal violation of the law (e.g., a parent believes that his or her child has been physically abused by a school employee or another student), the parent should immediately contact the local police department and the TN Department of Children's Services (DCS). School and district personnel who suspect student abuse are required to notify DCS and the ASD, and shall immediately do so upon notification or substantiated suspicion that a student has been abused.

### Current Board Leadership

List all current governing members and their roles on the table below (adding rows as needed).

Full Name	Current Job and Employer	Focus/Expertise*	Role on Governing Board
Vinessa Brown	Co-founder and Development Director of Lifeline to Success (ex-offender re-entry program)	Libertas Parent; Community development / engagement, marketing, nonprofit leadership, adult education, staff training and placement	Chair
Allison Leslie	Chief Academic Officer, Compass Community Schools	Longtime educator and school leader; former Superintendent of Aspire Public Schools in Memphis	Vice Chair
Andrew Boord	Portfolio Manager, Fenimore Asset Management	Financial management	Treasurer
Francis Ginski	Attorney, FedEx	Contracts, regulatory compliance, employment law	Secretary
Loretta Rudd	Professor of Child Development and Family Studies, University of Memphis	Early childhood development, former Montessori school leader; nonprofit board governance (also serves on Urban Child Institute board)	Trustee
Markise Rogers	Entrepreneur in urban real estate redevelopment	Community engagement; Finance (Former bond trader with Raymond James Financial); Veteran of US Navy	Trustee
Teddy King	Family & Community Engagement, Frayser Community Schools	Libertas Parent; Community development / engagement (20 year Frayser resident), marketing	Trustee
Jamesha Hayes	Training Institute Director, Teach for America - Memphis	K-12 teaching / curriculum and instruction; teacher development; Community engagement (advisor to Girls, Inc; alumna of Rhodes College)	Trustee
Bob Nardo	Executive Director, Libertas School	Education, nonprofit management	Ex officio, non-voting

Please include the following governance documents as Attachment F:

- F1. Articles of Incorporation
- F2. Proof of non-profit and tax-exempt status
- F3. By-laws
- F4. Code of Conduct
- F5. Conflict of Interest Policy
- F6. Board policies (including frequency of meetings, open meetings and open records)



## **2.2 Facilities**

As an ASD-authorized school, Libertas has occupied the Brookmeade Elementary school building at 3777 Edenburg Dr, 38127. Libertas has been responsible for utilities and routine maintenance. While the owner (SCS) has made some significant and valued capital repairs during our occupancy, Libertas has also made other necessary and significant capital repairs that SCS has not been able to complete due to their funding constraints.

Because of the time remaining on our initial charter (through 2025), we will remain at least until its expiration plus the additional time pursuant to T.C.A. 49-1-614(k) and the ASD agreement with SCS. However we desire to make the Brookmeade building our permanent home. SCS officials have previously indicated that they did not intend to keep operating this building; we have invested to make this facility suitable for our unique program and an asset for the Frayser community. We look forward to continued collaboration with local and state governments on the long-term facility plan.

Libertas has begun exploring permanent acquisition of the Brookmeade facility. By any reasonable standard this should be for a modest cost given the age and condition of the building, not to mention the conditions outlined in the law, which would credit against the purchase price the value of capital improvements we have made. Libertas has, through both the charter facilities grant and other funding sources, invested several hundred thousand dollars of capital into the facility over seven years (window replacement, floor replacement, lighting upgrades, additional space added via modulars, etc). There are a few hundred thousand dollars of other deferred maintenance needs, which we would need to address, and have begun exploring financial scenarios to do so that would work in our budget. However those costs will not need to be incurred until at least two years from now, and thus are not yet reflected in the near-term budget projections.

Other contingency plans are contemplated, but because this application only covers the time period during which our occupancy continues to be guaranteed, they are not addressed here.

### 2.3 Personnel/Human Capital

As discussed above, Libertas' board of trustees oversees and evaluates the performance of the Executive Director. As outlined on the organization chart, the Executive Director oversees and supports five direct reports, who in turn supervise other staff. Primary responsibilities for each role are outlined in Attachment G.

- Principal,
- Director of Operations,
- Controller (Finance Director)
- Development Coordinator
- Teacher Residency Director

Libertas uses the State's TEAM evaluation model. This model has proven suitable for helping teachers to work at a high level on conventional measures while also accommodating unique aspects of Montessori pedagogy.

Libertas has a strong record over seven years of ensuring qualified, certified teachers are in place.

As documented in the Faculty Handbook, all teachers and other employees whose positions require State licensure are required to maintain the appropriate active licenses as outlined by the State of Tennessee Office of Teacher Licensure. Continued employment is contingent upon remaining in good standing with the Office of Teacher Licensure. Our HR specialist maintains compliance folders and an internal database of all staff, including licensure, certifications, degrees, etc, and submits verification forms to TDE. This role also provides assistance to teachers to document and keep current their licensure status.

Likewise, all classes must have a teacher who has, or is making appropriate progress toward, relevant curricular credentials, such as recognized Montessori training or other relevant training, as determined by Libertas and communicated to the employee.



To support both full licensure and Montessori diplomas, Libertas has launched the Arete Memphis Public Montessori Residency. This dual-certification program is both a Tennessee EPP and nationally recognized by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE). The Residency also has a strategic recruitment plan that reaches out to partners throughout West Tennessee to ensure a strong and diverse pipeline of candidates.

#### *Staffing challenges*

Libertas has relatively high staff retention. According to Libertas' State Report Card, the school retained 79% of staff for the 2020-2021 school year (for the same time period, the ASD retention rate was 54% and the State average was 90%). The 2019-2020 staff retention rate at Libertas was 88%. And 90% of teachers remained from 2020-21 to 2021-22. Even though Libertas provided significant accommodations, we did experience a modest amount of attrition over the last 18 months due to the pandemic, including staff who chose not to work. Nevertheless, staff satisfaction remains extremely high at Libertas. Inform TN shows 100% teacher satisfaction and our internal surveys show 90+% satisfaction.



Even with good retention and satisfaction, we remain vigilant to ensure a strong, diverse pipeline of qualified teachers. The most exciting aspect is growing-our-own teachers through the Arete Public Montessori Teacher Residency. We are one of just a couple of programs in the nation (and the only in our region) to provide a dual track path to public school teacher licensure plus Montessori credentials. This strategy allows us to invest in candidates who are committed to our community as well as our school philosophy. The program also provides an advancement pathway for our teaching assistants who are a critical part of our educational program model. In the pilot years of this initiative, we have already promoted several teaching assistants into full teacher certification. This is also helping us increase the representation of the community in the teaching force: our school has almost 20% more African American teachers than the average Montessori school nationwide.

Another small but promising initiative for teacher recruitment and retention is our licensed infant and toddler day care, the “Nidos” (Italian for “nest”).

#### *Staffing and transition to the Commission*

Teachers and staff have already been informed of the application process and invited to share feedback. The faculty council meetings October 4 and 18, 2021 included a discussion on the potential transition with approximately a dozen staff members each. As with the parent meeting discussed above, these sessions focused heavily on recruitment and enrollment as they relate to ensuring access for our community.

#### *Leadership changes*

Libertas has made some adjustments to leadership structures as the school has grown and with a small amount of natural attrition related to life circumstances, but overall has had a high degree of consistency and retention.

The founding executive director still leads the organization.

The current board chair was a founding parent and board member, and has served in her office role for three years. The previous board chair continues to serve as a finance committee member.

The founding director of operations Ryan Abel served effectively for four years until relocating for family, and was succeeded by Nansa Jo Catchings, a highly qualified candidate now in her third year of service.

The school has outsourced most accounting and financial management over the years, but recently hired a Controller who has extensive experience in both private and nonprofit sectors, including as a charter network CFO.

Libertas was founded with a head teacher who reported to the executive director and coached the other teachers. The first occupant went on leave due to personal circumstances during the middle of year 2 (and later moved on) and was succeeded by Paula Payne, one of the founding teachers, who stayed in the role for two more full years (and continues as a part-time coach). In year 3 we added an academic coordinator position to assist the head teacher with curriculum and data; this was Josh Shelley, who had served first as a literacy specialist.

Going into year five, when Mrs. Payne retired from full-time work, we further changed our model by replacing the head teacher position with a principal role, with management authority to meet teacher and classroom

needs on a daily basis. Mr. Shelley was promoted into that position and continues now in his third year in the role and sixth at the school.

That delegation also freed the executive director to spend more time on strategic leadership, community partnership, fund development, and coordination and advocacy with local and state agencies overseeing and supporting Libertas and other public schools in Memphis and Tennessee.

Katelyn Woodard, a longtime teacher, took over as academic coordinator, and we added an additional instructional coaching position, which also reported to the principal.

Throughout, Kaleigh Donnelly has served as student support / special education coordinator.

*Photos of Libertas leaders and families with some of our friends:*

*Rep. Mark White, Cmsr. Penny Schwinn, Sen. Raumesh Akbari, Gov. Bill & Maria Lee*



In addition to making these leadership role developments, in year 2 Libertas established the previously described Faculty Council. This deliberative leadership group includes staff from all levels (managers, teachers, assistant teachers) and meets twice a month. Not only does it monitor our initiatives and data trends, but it is also an open forum for addressing anything from the budget to the dress code or our gardening program. The council invites diverse voices, each with a commitment to the success of the school to share their perspectives. We have already heard much positive feedback from teachers who feel their voices are heard through this forum. The Faculty Council also serves as Libertas' school turnaround leadership team, ensuring alignment across all aspects of our organization:

- Academics / instruction and assessment;
- Culture / attendance, discipline, and family engagement;
- Operations / Finance; and
- Human systems.

In its regular meetings, the Council reviews and updates the school's turnaround plan. The team is chaired by the Executive Director and consists of key staff:

- Bob Nardo, Executive Director
- Josh Shelley, Principal
- Nansa Catchings, Director of Operations
- Kaleigh Donnelly, Student Support Coordinator (SpEd and Child Study)
- SaBreena Boggan, Dean of Attachment Village team (social-emotional / behavior intervention)
- Toni Sudduth, Early Childhood Teacher Veteran
- Sally Helms, Elementary Consulting Teacher
- Katelyn Woodard, Academic Coordinator, Math Alignment Team Coordinator
- Lauren Martin, Upper Elementary Lead Teacher
- Illya Green, Early Childhood Lead Teacher
- Rebecca Kempf, Lower Elementary Lead Teacher
- Codeidra Smith, Assistant Teacher

The Executive Director reports upward from this group to our Board of Trustees (see below), which acts as the final oversight for school level efforts.

### Staffing Chart - Year 1 in Commission

Position	Year 1 in Commission
Executive Director	1
Principal	1
Attachment Village team - Dean and support	3
Academic Coordinator & coaches	2.5
Classroom Teachers	21
Teaching Aides or Assistants	20
Enrichment Teachers (e.g. physical education, music, library.)	3
Student monitors & coverage / subs	4
Special Education / Student Support Coordinator & Teachers	6
Intervention teachers	1
Special education assistants / paraprofessionals	4
Director of Operations	1
Finance, HR, development	2.5
Tech Support & Data Management	1
Custodial	4
Office manager, assistant, Family Engagement / services, and nurse	5
Teacher residency	1.5
After school program	1
<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>82.5</b>

## **2.4 Insurance**

A copy of the school's current insurance coverage is included as Attachment I.

## **2.5 Transportation**

Transportation is contracted through Rapid Route Transportation (RRT), a local, woman/minority-owned business. We would continue to contract with RRT if Libertas is authorized by the Commission. Currently, transportation is supervised on a daily basis by the Director of Operations.

The current signed agreement is attached.

## **2.6 Food Service**

Current food service at Libertas is provided by SCS, on a rolling agreement. From our conversations with SCS thus far we are not concerned about losing that specific service even if we transition authorizers. SCS uses our kitchen to source food for 1-2 other sites of theirs, and thus they have a mutual benefit from continuing to work with us. In the unlikely event this becomes a problem, we have begun the process of developing an SFA application through the state's child nutrition office (several of our staff have experience working in schools that were SFAs), and have done samples and meetings with 2 other food service companies (Preferred Foods or Revolution Foods), at least one of which proposes to continue our service at or below current reimbursement rates. If Libertas were authorized by the Commission, we could pursue food service through one of those providers or consider managing it in house.

Our food service arrangements are overseen on a daily basis by the Director of Operations.

## **2.7 Additional Operations**

We anticipate three main challenges for Libertas transitioning to a non-ASD authorizer. These challenges are addressed in additional detail earlier in the application.

1. Ensuring Libertas continues to primarily serve students in the Frayser community: This challenge is addressed in the section on enrollment, above.
2. Adjusting our financial operations to serve students with disabilities: For several years, the ASD operated a risk sharing pool for special education services. (This pool was begun by Libertas' executive director when he was Chief Operating Officer of the ASD.) It evolved over the years, eventually reaching a point where it provided for sharing of IDEA and a portion of BEP funds to ensure ASD schools could meet the needs of all students enrolled in their schools. That program ended in 2019 for various reasons. So, while Libertas is anxious to explore ways to collaboratively meet all students' needs, we are already meeting our heavy special education needs with our own resources, including but not limited to those made available to all schools through TDE.
3. Addressing our long-term facility needs: Moving from the ASD will, after three years, relieve SCS of the legal requirement to allow Libertas to use its current facility without charge (except for ongoing maintenance and any purchased services). As discussed in the facilities and budget narrative sections, we wish to stay in the facility, have invested in making it suitable, and have reason to believe that SCS would be open to making it our permanent home; thus we have begun approaching long term conversations with them about it. Challenges would remain in terms of deferred maintenance to be





addressed, but a viable pathway for that is being explored as well. Details would be developed and included in our full charter renewal application.

Libertas currently uses Powerschool for student information management. We do not anticipate significant challenges switching to the Commission's instance of Powerschool. PowerSchool is managed by our Data, Systems, and Technology Manager.

Libertas has a full time school nurse who oversees compliance with the Coordinated School Health Program. At this time, the school does not anticipate making any adjustments if authorized by the Charter Commission.

All immunizations are required upon enrollment, collected through our SchoolMint registration platform (with in person support from the Office Manager as needed). Health screenings are provided annually for vision, hearing, and speech.

Libertas has a full time physical education instructor to address physical activity. Outdoor recess is built into the daily schedule and there is a covered outdoor play/classroom space.

Libertas contracts with LeBonheur Children's Hospital to provide School Based Therapies. Please see the special education section for further discussion. They are a longstanding partner as reflected in their letter of support for our application.

As detailed above, our Child Study Team ensures we address the whole child with a network of supports. Our in-house Attachment Village Team provides social-emotional and behavior support. Counseling support is accomplished with the Anaya Partnership, a program of Youth Villages that was developed to provide intensive counseling to at-risk youth and their families in the most troubled urban communities in Memphis. Anaya Partnership specifically supports select organizations and charter schools in their effort to serve this vulnerable population of young people. In addition to providing behavioral and mental health services to students and their families, the program also offers continuing education, training, and in-service to school staff to assist them in identifying troubled and at-risk youth.

### **Family Life Instruction**

Parents are informed about the instructional materials used for family life instruction in our family handbook: Libertas educates students about family life in a manner that is age-appropriate for early childhood and elementary children, and respectful of the personhood and intellectual freedom of everyone in our community. Tennessee curriculum standards for family life and health<sup>15</sup> provide one determinant of age-appropriateness. For instance, elementary children learn to foster healthy friendships and value civil dialogue with different people, to take care of one's body, and to prevent bullying. According to Tennessee's standards, education in sexual development is reserved for middle school, while sexuality and relationships are reserved for 9th grade and beyond. By law, family life instruction emphasizes abstinence until marriage, and permits parents to examine instructional materials and excuse a student from any instruction. The law points toward another important determinant of appropriateness: deference to families' intellectual freedom (see section 7.6), especially their primary role in the formation and education of their children. Libertas' curriculum in the area of family life is consistent with requirements of State law; all decisions related to materials or instruction are made

---

<sup>15</sup> See Tennessee Health Education and Lifetime Wellness Standards, available at <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/standards/pe/Elementary-Health-Standards.pdf> (last viewed Nov. 11, 2021).  
*Libertas School of Memphis - Commission Application 2021*





by the school administration according to those requirements. If individual students or families express needs in areas related to family life or sexual development, Libertas offers supportive counseling by trained professionals, as well as referrals to a number of external partners. Finally and most importantly, in other areas where issues of family life materialize—including matters related to employment, enrollment, and social-emotional support—Libertas is an attachment village that is committed to practicing grace & courtesy: treating every person like they matter.

#### *Compliance monitoring*

The Executive Director is ultimately responsible for external and authorizer relations. Depending on the specific type of report, submissions will be handled by the Development / Special Projects Coordinator (general), Director of Operations, Controller (financial), HR Specialist (staffing/licensure), or Data/IT Specialist (enrollment and attendance), or Student Support Coordinator (IEPs, assessment).

#### **2.8 Charter Management Organization (if applicable) - N/A**

## 2.9 Waivers

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-13-111, a charter school may apply to either the authorizer or to the Commissioner of Education for a waiver of any State Board rule or statute that inhibits or hinders the proposed charter school's ability to meet its goals or comply with its mission statement. Approved waivers for schools authorized by the Commission are available on the Commission's website.

Waivers may not be granted for requirements related to:

- (a) Federal and state civil rights;
- (b) Federal, state, and local health and safety;
- (c) Federal and state public records;
- (d) Immunizations;
- (e) Possession of weapons on school grounds;
- (f) Background checks and fingerprinting of personnel;
- (g) Federal and state special education services;
- (h) Student due process;
- (i) Parental rights;
- (j) Federal and state student assessment and accountability;
- (k) Open meetings;
- (l) At least the same equivalent time of instruction as required in regular public schools;
- (m) Teacher licensure or teacher evaluation; or
- (n) Requirements in the charter school statute, T.C.A. 49 Chapter 13 or State Board of Education rules and regulations specific to charter schools.

Please list all requested waivers below:

State Statute, Rule, or SBE Policy	Description of Statute, Rule, or SBE Policy	Proposed replacement policy or practice	How this waiver will increase student achievement
T.C.A. § 49-1-302(e)	Duty Free Lunch	We believe that it is important for teachers to have flexibility in how they use lunch time. While all Libertas teachers are encouraged to break for lunch, many choose to spend lunch time getting to know their students better or catching up on to-dos from the morning.	Allowing teachers flexibility to use their time in the way they feel is most effective leads to better student outcomes
T.C.A. § 49-3-306(a); SBE Rule 0520-01-02-.02; SBE Policy 5.600	Compensation – Licensed Personnel Salaries	While we ensure that public monies will be used properly and all personnel will be paid adequately, accurately and on time, it is critical to our program that the payroll system reflects our individual school's purpose and philosophy.	Libertas will use compensation as one tool to attract and retain the best possible teachers, leading to high-quality instruction provided to students in every classroom.

T.C.A. § 49-3-311	Capital Outlay	It is critical that we have freedom from non- health and safety standards for the school site and have control of the facility, rather than the board of education.	Libertas will maximize the effectiveness of school site resources to drive student achievement and align our building choices with our mission and goals.
T.C.A. § 49-3-359(a)	Instructional Materials/Supplies	In lieu of distributing funds to teachers to purchase their own instructional materials/supplies, Libertas acquires high-quality instructional materials/supplies for teachers and the school and distributes them prior to the first day of school.	Acquiring high-quality instructional materials/supplies for all teachers and distributing them prior to the first day of school, as opposed to distributing funds to teachers for them to buy their own, will ensure that Libertas maintains high-quality instructional materials/supplies used in each classroom aligned to Libertas' academic model.
T.C.A. § 49-5-408-409	Contracts and Employment Termination	All Libertas employees are “at-will” employees. All teachers are assessed based on their performance and student achievement.	Retaining high-performing teachers allows Libertas to maximize student growth and achievement.
T.C.A. § 49-5-101(a); SBE Rule 0520-01-02- .03(5)	Staffing Requirements –Licensed Principals	Libertas will recruit and interview all highly qualified candidates.	Libertas will recruit the most qualified candidates and be able to hire the leaders who will most effectively fulfill its mission.
T.C.A. § 49-5-501-513	Tenure	All Libertas employees are “at-will” employees.	A major element of student success will be Libertas’s ability to attract and retain a staff that is committed to our vision and able to deliver effective instruction every day.
T.C.A. § 49-5-702 - 713 and T.C.A. § 49-5-806 - 810	Leave	Libertas sets its own leave policies in compliance with all state and federal laws and approved by the Libertas Board of Directors.	Libertas' leave policies balance both the needs of teachers and those of students by minimizing disruptions to student learning.
T.C.A. § 49-6-2206-2207	Curriculum – Use of Unapproved Textbooks	Libertas will use instructional materials aligned to its academic model.	In order to meet the wide needs of all students within the Montessori model, including students with unique learning needs, Libertas will select the curriculum and textbooks.
SBE Rule 0520-01-03-.07	Library Information Center Personnel	Libertas provides students access to extensive high quality materials in the classroom and library. Existing staff at Libertas support library activities in place of a librarian, and increase library resources based on student need.	Existing staff will assist students in getting the most out of classroom and school library resources and adjust support based on student needs.

## **SECTION 3 FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPACITY**

### **3.1 Budgeting**

See Attachment K

### **3.2 Budget Narrative**

See Attachment L

**3.3 Network Financial Plan (only applicable if the charter school is a part of a larger network) - N/A**  
N/A.

## SECTION 4: PORTFOLIO REVIEW / PERFORMANCE RECORD

### 4.1 Past Performance

To avoid excessive repetition, please see section 1.4 (academics) above for thorough discussion and data citations on growth and achievement and documentation of eligibility. In short, Libertas is eligible to apply because we achieved “priority exit status” as defined by Tennessee’s school accountability framework in two ways: both (a) by achieving Level 5 TVAAS growth for two consecutive years, and (b) by increasing our school success rate to the 25th percentile (well above the 15th percentile threshold).

How have we gotten here?

1. high-fidelity implementation of rich, developmentally-responsive Montessorio learning, intentionally aligned to state standards and executed with reflective, data-informed practice;
2. deep engagement with families and our Frayser home, for the whole child—mind, hands, and heart;
3. extraordinarily committed and well-formed teachers and staff, especially through our teacher residency;
4. generous and bold financial and policy support by local and state leaders.

*Why does Libertas deserve continued authorization?*

The Charter Commission should authorize Libertas to continue to provide the educational program that has led to our results for students in Frayser and the wider Memphis community for years to come.

Key data are presented in detail above in 1.4. In summary, while we have not reached the goals set out by the ASD in 2012-2015 when most of its schools began (and before the more rigorous TN Ready standards and assessment were implemented), we have nevertheless made dramatic growth—Level 5 for consecutive years—while steadily improving absolute proficiency in statewide rankings (25th percentile overall) to a level significantly higher than any other ASD school, higher than any elementary charter school in Memphis, and in the top 10% of charters statewide. We are committed to equity, serving the largest population of students with disabilities in the district (almost 24%), who are growing even faster than typical peers, and achieving in the top 15% of the state. The school has undertaken strategically aligned efforts to address chronic absenteeism — and in fact we made nearly double our AMO in absence reduction in the year prior to the pandemic. Our efforts have been bolstered by a strong culture: 90%+ family engagement and satisfaction every year, dramatic reduction in suspensions (more than three-quarters; maintaining among the lowest rates in the district), and zero expulsions or remands. Our school is fulfilling the sacred promises that our state made to children in deciding to transform it.

Libertas’ trajectory of performance over the previous six years, and our challenges and adjustments, have been thoroughly addressed above. In short, we have shown greater than a year’s worth of academic growth on nationally normed assessments for years, but it took additional steps—especially in math—to align student practice with the state testing format to manifest that growth on TN Ready.



### Discipline

Our student discipline has been a major strength, due to our unique school culture discussed above, with suspensions reduced roughly three quarters since the turnaround, and maintained at a level roughly less than half the district average throughout our tenure.

### **Attendance**

Studies show that attendance is an important indicator of school effectiveness and long-term student outcomes.<sup>16</sup> From our own school's historical data, we see a strong correlation between family engagement and attendance, behavior, and academic success (the following analysis is based on the last full year prior to the pandemic). Students with good attendance had a 17% higher rate of meeting MAP reading goals than those with chronic absenteeism. We also noted a correlation between attendance and family engagement: those with good attendance averaged 7.6 hours of family engagement per year, 63% more than the 4.8 hours per year among chronically absent students. The correlation between family engagement and attendance is more pronounced when you look at parent-teacher conferences. These meetings, held twice a year, offer parents the most in-depth understanding of children's development. Families of students who were not chronically absent attended about 92% of conferences, whereas chronically absent students' families attended only 78.1% of conferences—almost a 14% difference. Finally, children with suspensions averaged just 4 hours of family engagement, versus an overall average of 7.1 hours. In short, family engagement is clearly closely related to attendance, behavior, and achievement.

These reasons—including but more than attendance—explain the major focus on family engagement discussed earlier in this application. Regarding attendance specifically, the definition of success changed over the course of our initial charter, with the state shifting focus from daily attendance to chronic absenteeism under ESSA. Even so, we had cut chronic absenteeism by nearly half before the pandemic, from over 36% prior to turnaround down to roughly 20% the last full year before the pandemic—making nearly double our AMO that year. We moved slightly backward under the virus, but we nevertheless were still dramatically better than comparable schools (roughly half the ASD's rate).

Earlier in the application we outlined some of our strategies to engage families and help them access wraparound services to overcome barriers related to attendance. In the last full year before the pandemic, our Family Engagement Counselor spearheaded 24 proactive involvement opportunities at a variety of times to increase accessibility, and reached 94% family involvement (over 2,100 total hours), as well as 150 individual family attendance interventions. This not only helped reduce absenteeism to about 20.1%—almost 2% better than our goal—but, based on a broad sample of 72% of our parents, we earned a 97% satisfaction rate, and we saw a 14% increase in teacher satisfaction with how we support them around these needs.

We will continue to have a Family Engagement coordinator dedicated to proactive family engagement and reactive attendance intervention.

---

<sup>16</sup> School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and Academic, Attendance, and Behavior Outcomes in High Schools, available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1098300715580992> (last viewed June 2020). This research and its summary was included in Libertas' 2019-20 School Improvement Plan, submitted to TDE on 9/19. Though the study is based on high school students, the same barriers and concerns exist in elementary and middle schools.





Family engagement increases connectedness, fosters trust so that we can talk about student needs, and strengthens families' skills to be their best for their children. Before planning sessions, we survey parents to find out the times, days, and types of educational events most appealing, and then schedule them. We offer over three dozen involvement opportunities (almost one per week), and seek to maintain 94% family involvement (over 2,100 total hours). We've had success with monthly "parenting partners" sessions where we discuss a topic of parental concern, monthly student enrichment sessions that parents attend, and quarterly curriculum nights. We also arrange volunteer opportunities, conversation opportunities among parents on child-rearing issues, and workshops to strengthen parents in their own domain presented by school staff or outside parties. For example, we host a two-month intensive LENA/early language program for parents with their young children to foster more positive oral language experiences in the home. Based on a broad sample of 72% of our parents, we earned a 97% satisfaction rate on programming. We believe this work was instrumental in allowing communication to flow between school and home, building trust and connectedness.

In addition to such sessions, we use reading homework as a family engagement tool and an indicator of students who may need additional support for attendance. Educating parents on the method, pedagogy, and successes of Libertas—with a focus on the importance of required daily homework reading assignments—increases parental confidence in the value of a Libertas education.

This role also monitors attendance and other data (eg. homework completion as a leading indicator), and intervenes via meetings with families off-track for attendance. These meetings may be during the daytime, afternoon, or evening to accommodate families' logistical needs. The purpose is to investigate obstacles and help refer / connect families to resources to overcome obstacles to full participation in school: job training or placement, housing options, food resources, clothing (access to clothes closets or laundry facilities), transportation (we help parents arrange carpools), physical or mental health services, etc. Overall we expect to conduct approximately 150 intervention interactions with families throughout the year. The coordinator tracks each intervention, provides incentives for attendance as appropriate (e.g. "shout outs" for best or most improved attendance), or escalates to the full Child Study team as needed. Our family engagement coordinator

also keeps teachers informed as appropriate about home issues facing specific students, and involves teachers as needed in family meetings to strategize around behavior, attendance, and homework.

Libertas coordinates support among community partners to meet the social/emotional and logistic needs of Libertas students and families. As discussed above, Libertas is an active member of the neighborhood immediately surrounding the school as well the broader Frayser community. Libertas is deeply connected to the many community partners who provide services in Frayser. Members of the community serve on our Board of Trustees and committees. Through these relationships, we are able to connect our students and families with partners who provide job training and placement, housing, food, clothing, transportation, childcare, physical or mental health services, etc. These services help to reduce the obstacles between families and the value of full participation in school.

#### *Subgroup proficiency and improving academic performance for all students*

Above in the academic section we noted some of our subgroup data. Students with disabilities—a large and vulnerable subgroup—are performing exceptionally well, in the top 15% of the students (86.8th percentile). African American students—the large majority of our school—are in the upper half of the state (52.5th percentile; though certainly we are striving for considerably higher proficiency given the staggering rates in our state for these students). Within the school, our weakest subgroup (though still well above district average) is economically disadvantaged students at the 18.5th percentile for proficiency statewide.

How to help ensure continued progress for our subgroups? Because of our school's relatively small sample sizes, it is harder than it might seem to make strong conclusions based on the data about the different needs of our subgroups. Interestingly, in a recent internal analysis of our TVAAS data, we found that the individual students who met or exceeded their growth projections were drawn from all across our school population: ED and non; Black and other; low-achieving or higher. This is both frustrating but reassuring: our program doesn't necessarily work for some subgroups more than others. What does this mean moving forward? Not one "magic bullet" but a comprehensive plan. We will continue to address SEL-related obstacles to school for at-risk children. We will continue to deepen teachers' content knowledge through our Residency and PD, as well as their relationships with students. And we will continue the observation of student work samples and data-driven instruction cycles that have helped teachers to match individual students with the right work, *and* also continue ensuring through CKLA/ELA and math seminars that children have access to rigorous grade level content daily. Together, these strategies will maximize the chances that students in all subgroups will be their best.

#### *Operational and financial performance*

The Board has been stable and well rounded since inception. New members have been added over time to strengthen its capacity. The founding executive director, reporting to the board, still leads the organization. The school leadership design evolved over the years and with the school's growth to have a more typical principal with management authority to meet teacher and classroom needs on a daily basis, freeing the executive director to spend more time on strategic leadership and external partnership; this has enabled us raise funds, influence policy, and seize opportunities such as to start a teacher Residency and child care program. Together, the Board and senior leadership have avoided the churn that undermines so many urban schools and instead maintained focus on continuous improvement.

In spring 2021, Libertas engaged in a new round of strategic planning. Overseen by the board, this process included extensive conversations with all members of the Libertas community: parents, community leaders, teachers and staff, and board members. A few high level strategies were chosen and key projects to pursue



over the next several years. These began with ensuring a strong return to school in 2021, extending the impact of Libertas' in-house teacher training program to include teaching assistants, preparing for and successfully transitioning authorizers, and planning for long-term facility needs. Behind the scenes, our academic support team continues to refine our curriculum, instruction, and assessment roadmap, replicating the same alignment process as we have successfully implemented in ELA and math to prepare for the return of accountability testing in science. Meanwhile, we are strengthening operations by recently adding an in-house Controller.

Libertas' operations and financial performance have been consistently strong. Thanks to years of careful financial management and aggressive fundraising, we are in a good financial position. The organization has 6 straight years of good audits, demonstrating careful stewardship of public funds and philanthropic support. Moreover Libertas has tirelessly worked to secure all appropriate public funds to support its students.

In all these ways, we are poised to provide strong service to our community for many years.

*Prior performance evaluations, authorizer decisions, financials, and litigation*

Libertas was authorized by the ASD and is operating under its initial charter agreement. Libertas has not been subject to any conditional renewals or other such actions.

Libertas was authorized by the ASD and is operating under its initial charter agreement. Libertas has not been subject to any conditional renewals or other such actions.

See Attachment N for the two most recent official evaluations from our authorizer, including for the 18/19 and 19/20 school years. Please note that the 19/20 evaluation omitted academic indicators because of the pandemic onset before state testing; therefore the 18/19 evaluation is included, as the last comprehensive evaluation (including academic data). As will be seen from both reports, Libertas has met expectations academically, in terms of compliance/ student and family rights, and in finance. Please note that the 19/20 evaluation also includes a letter of amendment from the ASD showing that Libertas was in full compliance with banking requirements (initially in question because we had banked with the largest Memphis-based bank, but which unfortunately was not part of TN's required collateral pool for banks, thus requiring us to transition to a different institution).

Attachment O includes 2019 and 2020 audits. The 2020 audit includes an end of year balance sheet. Additionally we include year to date financial statements and balance sheet through Q1 of FY22.

Libertas has not been the subject of current or past litigation.



## ATTACHMENTS

Please include attachments labeled according to the following schedule:

- ☐ ATTACHMENT A: Annual Academic Calendar and School's Daily Schedule by Grade

NOTE: The Family Handbook addresses all three of these items and is labeled "Attachment B.C.D.:"

- ☐ ATTACHMENT B: Student Handbook/School Forms
- ☐ ATTACHMENT C: Student Discipline Policy (if not already included in Attachment B)
- ☐ ATTACHMENT D: Enrollment Policy
  
- ☐ ATTACHMENT E: Letters of Support/MOUs/Contracts from the Community
- ☐ ATTACHMENT F: Governance Documents
  - ☐ F1. Articles of Incorporation
  - ☐ F2. Proof of non-profit and tax-exempt status
  - ☐ F3. By-laws
  - ☐ F4. Code of Conduct
  - ☐ F5. Conflict of Interest Policy
  - ☐ F6. Board policies
- ☐ ATTACHMENT G: School Organizational Chart
- ☐ ATTACHMENT H: Employee Manual/Personnel Policies
- ☐ ATTACHMENT I: Insurance Coverage
- ☐ ATTACHMENT J: CMO Agreement (if applicable)
- ☐ ATTACHMENT K: SY21-22 Approved Budget and SY22-23 Projected Budget
- ☐ ATTACHMENT L: Budget Narrative
- ☐ ATTACHMENT M: Network Financial Plan
- ☐ ATTACHMENT N: School Reports/Authorizer Evaluations
- ☐ ATTACHMENT O: Audited financial statements (last two years) and most recent internal financial statements
- ☐ ATTACHMENT P: Litigation Documents (if applicable)
- ☐ ATTACHMENT Q: Original approved charter application